

# IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

OCTOBER, 1953

35¢

## THE TIME ARMADA By Fox B. Holden



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# Introducing the



# AUTHOR



*Fox B. Holden*



**B**REATHES there a newsman with soul so dead who never plugged up the holes in his head and muttered "damme, I wish somebody would interview *me* for once"? And, having so wished and gotten no place, toyed idly with the idea of doing the job himself someday . . .

Anyhow, this one's got the chance to give it a whirl in 500 words, and so, excelsior—

Holden: (interviewing) Well go ahead and talk!

Holden: (leaning back, contemplating) I suppose there are a few things that *can* be printed. I was one of a family of one boy, born in Rochester, N. Y. in 1923 B. S.—that's Before Sisters—of whom there were a couple some 12 and 15 years later. There still are, and

my life hasn't been the same since. There, print that.

H: (interviewing) You've got 380 words to go and I don't think we can use that about sisters.

H. (solemnly) Better keep it tame, at that. At the peculiar age of 12, in a Poughkeepsie, N. Y. grammar school, I got interested in aeronautics, Willy Ley, science-fiction, and money. Some time later, at Poughkeepsie High School, my interests broadened perceptibly. They now included aeronautics, Willy Ley, science-fiction, and money.

H: (still interviewing) No girls?

H: (thinking) I had heard the word; came across it once at Middlebury College, in Vermont. That's where I went to study aeronautical

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## Stories of Science and Fantasy

OCTOBER 1953

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Number 9

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November Issue on Sale

September 29th

Photo cover by Malcolm Smith, suggested by THE TIME ARMADA. Astronomical photos, front and back covers courtesy Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories. Interior art by W. E. Terry and H. W. McCauley. Cartoons by Glueck, Baker, Reid, Scheffy, Ludway and Kohler.

# The Editorial

A LONG time ago we made a decision in regard to serials; we wouldn't use one unless a truly outstanding book length novel crossed our desk, and if we did use one it would run for only two issues—we never could stand having to wait more than a month to finish a story! The great majority of you readers, have agreed with us on this policy. So now it bears fruit!

THIS month—for the first time—IMAGINATION publishes a serial in two parts. We believe the author, Fox B. Holden, has written as gripping and dramatic a science fiction novel as we've read in many years; it will quite likely be published in book form in the near future; thus we've taken a new step forward which we hope will meet with your approval. We would like to stress again that serials in Madge will really have to be outstanding, and, presented only in two parts.—If you can't wait a month to finish reading THE TIME ARMADA we can provide you with a copy of the November issue right now! As this issue is on sale, the November issue is already being sent to subscribers—so turn to page 162 and send your subscription in right away. Your copy will be sent you FREE (our

bonus offer) and the same day your order is received. And there's another reason you'll want to subscribe now — the November issue features Robert A. Heinlein's new story, SKY LIFT. A Heinlein story is, of course, a must, for every science fiction reader, so you can make sure you don't miss getting your copy by subscribing. Do it today!

EVERY summer, it seems, the flying saucers break out in a rash throughout the country. This summer is no exception. About the most unusual account recently was one reported over the Wire Services, near Oroville, California. It seems that a prospector was making his way through a grove in the hills toward a creek. He suddenly came upon a clearing near the creek, and smack into a bizarre experience. He says he saw a saucer-shaped object at rest on the ground (size judged to be around eight feet in diameter and five feet high); but it wasn't so much the saucer that amazed him as the figure he saw standing by the creek. According to this prospector he saw a "conventionally clad" figure four feet high, carrying what seemed to be a silver-like pail, which apparently had been used to obtain water from the creek.

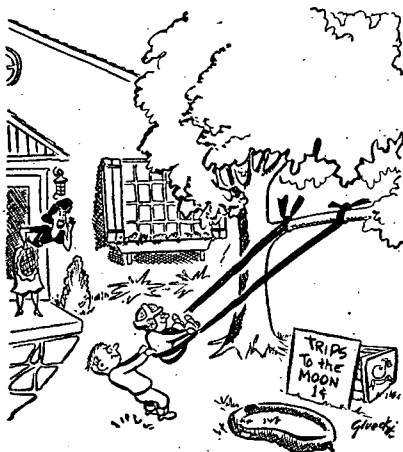


THE "alien" made a beeline toward the flying saucer, and as he approached it a section of smooth metal rolled back soundlessly. The "alien" disappeared inside, the portal slid shut again, and the ship rose from the clearing at a tremendous speed, vanishing in the sky. The prospector picked his jaw up from the ground, hurried back to town and blurted his story to the world.

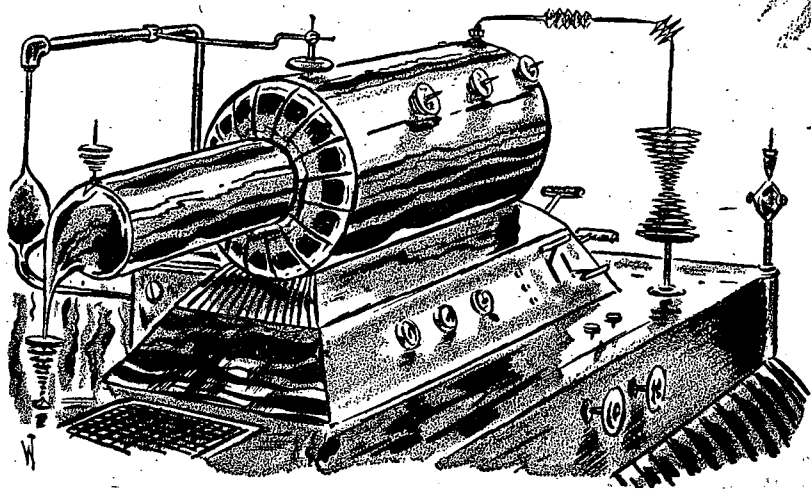
NOW we never bat an eye at flying saucer stories, because we are convinced they *do* exist, and further, we believe they're extra-terrestrial. But we are inclined to cast a skeptical eye on that part of the story concerned with four foot high beings—carrying pails. We're sure the story became dramatized through the press to provide a "sensational" angle. Flying-saucer appearances have become too frequent and wide-spread to be newsworthy unless there's a gimmick. The next thing you know the papers will report a witness who kibitzed at a gin game with the saucer boys . . . which, come to think of it, we'd like to see ourselves; that's one way to get a saucer for keeps; our "visitors" may have the edge on us planet-bound terrans technologically, but the science of gin rummy involves a sixth sense for a quick knock—and that we got! Come on down, boys, and try a hand.

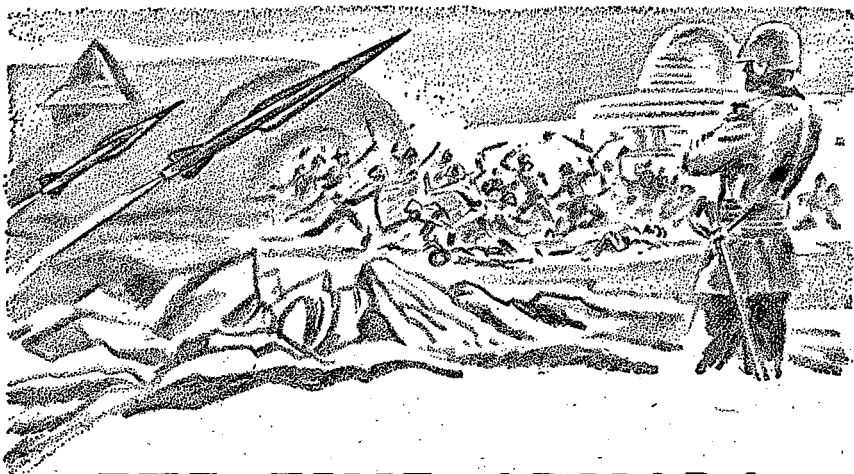
WE were hoping we'd see most of Madge's writers at the 11th World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia over the Labor Day weekend. But sadly, some of the

boys can't make it. We got a letter from Geoff St. Reynard expressing his regrets—from the isle of Tobago in the British West Indies. Tough life, Geoff, old man, whiling away the summer in a tropic paradise. And Dwight V. Swain has holed himself up in an air-conditioned office somewhere in Oklahoma and vows he won't come out until he finishes his new cover novel for Madge. (A good idea at that!) Then too we understand Mack Reynolds is deep in the heart of Mexico, so he probably won't be able to tear himself away from the *enchiladas*. Too, Rog Phillips has mysteriously disappeared into some home workshop in Chicago, where we learn, he is hard at work on some highly secret invention — probably a typewriter that writes its own stories . . . Don't forget, Heinlein next month, and page 162 this issue . . . . . wlh



"Junior!"





# THE TIME ARMADA

By

Fox B. Holden

**Politics and science don't mix — except that Congressman Blair had once been a physicist. This was The Beginning — but The End was worlds away . . .**

5:20 P. M., April 17, 1958.

CONGRESSMAN Douglas Blair shivered a little, turned up his coat collar against the gray drizzle that had been falling like a finely-sifted fog all day. His head ached, his nose felt stuffy, and he was tired. It was good of Grayson to pick him up.

The front seat of the dark blue sedan was soft and reassuring, and the warm current of air from the heater beneath it felt good. He let his spare, barely six-foot body slump like a bag of wet wash and pushed his hat back with the half-formed thought that it might ease the dull pressure behind his eyes. "Rough going today, eh, Con-

gressman?"

Grayson twisted the blue sedan into outbound Washington traffic, turned the windshield wipers to a faster pace. Click-click, click-click, and Blair wished someone would invent windshield wipers for the brain, to be worn like a radio head-set, maybe with a hole in the top of the head.

"Hey, buddy! Republicans got your tongue?"

"No, sorry, Carl. Just tired. It's that damned McKenny bill."

"Off the record?"

"I'm afraid so for now, Carl. He can get the thing through—he's so damn clever he should've been a woman. Got the steel men eating out of his hand. Made no bones about telling the rest of us today that what the hell, the people never had anything to say about it, anyway. The work of government is up to the professionals. The sooner the people get their nose out of it, the better off they'll be. He said that, Carl, right in front of everybody. And nobody so much as blinked."

The drizzle started to develop into a dark blue rain as they headed toward the suburbs.

"What's going to happen, Carl?" Blair said after awhile.

"If I knew, believe me, I wouldn't be sitting here! I don't know, Doug. We'll all cook in Hell to-

gether I guess. Here, have a cigarette."

"Thanks. No, dammit. That's just it—if they'd take this going to Hell business and forget about it—sink it, scuttle it. Nobody goes to Hell, he makes his own if that's the way he lives, or he makes his own personal Heaven or Paradise or whatever you call it if that's the way he lives. Most of us are in between someplace, a little scared, mostly indifferent, and too mixed up to see the simple fact that the way of living we've got in this country isn't so bad but what just plain honesty and a little intelligence couldn't run it right side up."

"Sure, sure, I know and you're right, Doug. But take it easy . . . Things aren't always as bad as they look."

BLAIR inhaled on the cigarette, laughed a little and felt better. Sometimes he knew he sounded like a college kid trying to tell his father what was wrong with the world, but that was why he liked Carl. Carl let him talk, knew it was his way of blowing off the pent-up steam.

"You know what, chum?" They were running smoothly along the highway now, the engine a reassuring hum of power, the interior of the sedan warm and relaxing.

The rain was letting up a little, but dirty banks of fog had started gathering at the roadside like ghosts of all the work of the day, tenuous, without substance.

"What, Carl?"

"You should've stuck with the M.I.T. degree after all. Hell with your brain you'd've made that try for the Moon a success last month instead of another near miss."

"Maybe you're right. Those boys know what they're doing though. I'll stick to puttering."

"Puttering the man calls it. 'He hath a lean and hungry look—such men are dangerous . . . ' Myself, I think that gadget you 'putter' with in that cellar of yours is some kind of a gismo to hypnotize all the states-righters into doing something intelligent like dropping dead without being told!"

"With ingenuity such as yours, my friend, I think I could really accomplish something in that cellar of mine at that! That's the trouble. You writers, and newsmen have all the good ideas—slide-rules don't think worth a damn! Instead of a wonderful creation such as you suggest, what have I got? A pile of junk that may, if it works in any degree at all, turn out to be a fairly good television set . . . "

"You wouldn't kid an old friend. That martini you were putting

away the other night said that it was an experiment with something called tired light."

"Exactly. Television."

"Look, the quality of curiosity is not strained, it droppeth as a gentle ten-ton truck from twenty stories up! You said—or the martini said anyway—that if this little gimcrack of yours works, it'd be able to bring back pictures of things that happened in the past. You're guilty until proven innocent, Galileo. Start talking."

"Off the record—"

"I should broadcast it and get dunked in a witch's chair."

"Well—the martini had it a little balled up, but the essential idea's there I guess. Anyway, it isn't everybody who has a space-warp for a household pet."

"Or Einstein for a hobby."

"Blah, this is strictly Blair. That's why it won't work, and I'd be only sensationally nuts if I ever thought it would. But some men take Scotch for their nerves, and I take Scotch with electronics. More of a jolt that way."

"Yuk, yuk."

THAT was why it was good to have Carl for a friend. No matter how sorry you got to feeling for yourself, he could usually snap you out of it one way or another. Right now, Doug thought,



Carl was diligently at work with that peculiar brand of psychology that all newspapermen strive ceaselessly to acquire that makes people blab when they ought to keep quiet. But why not—Carl wouldn't know what the hell it was all about and he wouldn't care, if he thought it would take some of the pressure off.

"Well, listen then. Ever look through an observatory telescope and have somebody tell you you were focused on some star or other a couple of thousand light years away? Maybe it was in the process of blowing up and becoming a nova or something like that. Anyhow, it would be explained to you that you were seeing that star as it was two thousand years ago. You were seeing, for instance, an explosion that happened twenty centuries in the past. Reason, of course, is that it took the light that long to get from the star to you. More simply, the light that strikes your back porch in the morning left the sun about nine minutes before."

"Very clear. Only how come, if the universe is a closed form of infinity like it says in all the new books, this light never doubles back on itself—gives you two or even a million images of the same star?"

"That's where the tired light

comes in. After a certain length of time—unthinkable aeons of it—it, like all other forms of energy, peters out. Runs down. Quits. Kaput. They call it entropy. It constitutes, actually, a gradual running down, growing old of the universe. As far as anyone knows, this happens before it 'doubles back' on itself, as you put it. You can't catch it coming around the second time to see what you looked like umpteenillion ages ago. So, if you want a second look at yourself, you've got to go out and catch the light which you reflected in the past—"

"Oh brother. You mean anybody on a planet, say, forty light years from Earth with a supertel-lescope looking at us would be watching the battle of Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood! A hundred and eighty light years away he'd see us slugging it out against King George III at Saratoga and Valley Forge!"

"You've got it. In other words, the light reflected from Earth then is somewhere deep in Space now. If you could haul it in on some kind of a receiver, you could see everything all over again—you could watch the land masses of Earth as they shifted to form the continents as we know them today."

"You'd need something faster

than light to trap the light itself—and I thought that was against Fitzgerald or somebody.”

“If you followed the same space warps the light did, it would be. But if it were possible to operate your receiver *through* the fabric of space-time, instead of *along* it—a kind of short-cut—you might turn up with what you’re after.”

“I am sorry I got into this.”

Blair smiled tiredly. “Me too. Hell, I’m fooling around with things I don’t pretend to know anything about. Just enough to putter. Just enough to keep my mind off all-day-long. God knows what I’ll get when I turn the damn thing on. Probably not even snow so I’m not worried. Turn left at the next stop-light—they’ve got that new cut-off finished.” He started buttoning his coat. Grayson turned left as ordered.

“But suppose it works?”

“Wow. Then the steam-fitters would envy me.”

“Well it sure oughtta do something. You’ve been tinkering with it for—how long? Couple years?”

“About four I guess, off and on. Sometimes I get to wondering what it’ll do if it does do anything.”

“Show us Lillian Russell, maybe, or Little Egypt!”

“There’s a million possible results when you go fooling around with the structure of the universe,

Carl. I guess that’s what fascinates me. A little learning is a dangerous thing, they say. Dot’s afraid I’ll blow us up.”

“Well—she could have something there!”

“The thing probably won’t even toast a piece of bread. But I’d rather fool with it than collect buttons or play bridge or some other damfool thing, so . . .”

The blue sedan sloshed up the puddled drive-way to the new nine-room bungalow and at the porch Doug Blair got out. A wind had sprung up and the dampness suddenly grasped his body, clung, as though he were naked.

“Time for a drink, supper?”

“No, thanks, Doug—gotta see a man. Now take it easy—let the state of the nation go bury its head for tonight and you have some fun blowing fuses!”

“Yeah, yeah! O.K. and thanks.”

The blue sedan sloshed its way back to the highway, and Doug went into the house.

**D**OUGLAS Blair kissed his wife and, as he did every time he kissed her, wondered how he’d been so lucky. He preferred to think as seldom as memory would permit of how close he’d come on a couple of occasions to marrying a country club, a bridge deck, a women’s society, an Emily Post

book. And when Dot had given him Terry and Mike, she'd topped off the miracle of herself with the added one of two healthy young minds that had already learned to say "prove it!" Some of the tiredness left him, a lot of the aching discouragement was brushed away.

"Tired, Doug?"

"I was."

There was a sudden thundering which grew quickly into the crashing noises often made by wild elephants getting exercise in a native village.

"The-patter of little feet," Dorothy said.

"Oh. For a minute I thought it was termites. Hi, fellas! What kind of trouble did we almost keep out of today?"

"Hi, dad! Hey, Mike says you aren't ever going to try it out. You are, aren't you?"

"I didn't say not ever. I said *maybe* not ever. Things like the Contraption take years to develop, don't they, dad?"

"Well," Doug said, doing what he could to stem the onslaught and still stay on his feet, "what's the source of all this wisdom, Mr. Scientist?"

"Some day I'll be a scientist. Mommy said so, didn't you, mom?"

Every so often Doug wonder-

ed where they got that solid healthy look, and if either of them would ever faintly resemble the Cassius after whom even Carl thought he should have been named. The red hair of course was Dorothy's. The blue eyes were Dorothy's. Even the brains were, he sometimes suspected, all Dorothy's. But the dormant challenge that grew, not yet quite fully awakened, somewhere behind the freckled, ten-year-old faces—that, if it matured well, would be his.

"If," Doug said then, "you three will let a hungry man eat his supper, he'll let you in on a little surprise before hand. That is, if anybody's interested—"

"Tell us!"

"Is it, Doug?"

"Your brilliant father has exactly three connections to solder on the Contraption, and then—well, after supper, we'll all see together." He laughed. Terry and Mike hooted. Dorothy looked a little worried, and told the boys to wash up.

IT covered half the ten-foot workbench, its large screen a huge, lens-like square eye as it glinted beneath the glare of the cold-cathode lights that lined the ceiling of the laboratory-like cellar.

Doug put the cooling soldering-iron back in its place. Dorothy

had her Christmas camera mounted on a tripod a few feet back, "Just in case," she said, "it does something before it blows up."

Terry and Mike were silent, eyes wide, not quite behind their mother.

"We shall now," Doug said, "see if we can get a look at Hopalong Cassidy the way he looked when I was a boy. Better yet, maybe Jack Benny when he was 39 . . . and Valentino . . ."

He closed the switch, and the cathode lights flickered, went out. There was a humming sound that seemed to come from all sides of the cellar rather than from the Contraption, and the bluish glow emanated from the square convex eye. Directly before it, they watched.

The light shimmered, gave the illusion that the Contraption itself was shimmering, fading. The work bench became indistinct.

"Doug—"

And then the workbench and the Contraption were gone, the overhead cathode tubes were gone, and daylight was filtering through a cellar window that had moved about four feet along the wall—which was now made of glass brick instead of concrete.

Doug and his wife stood rooted. Terry and Mike were gone, too.

## CHAPTER II

SHE was clad in superbly tailored cream-colored slacks of a material that was glass-like in sheen, an equally well-fitted blouse of forest green hardly a shadow less than opaque, and sandals of a soft, flexible texture slightly raised at the heel. The wide cummerbund of silken flame that circled her slender waist was her only ornamentation.

Doug's pastel shirt felt like a feather; it lay open at the throat and clung comfortably about his chest and shoulders, then tapered leisurely to his waist. The trousers were of the same weight and of a darker hue somewhere between the blue of midnight and cobalt; the sandals were like hers.

He did not understand.

"You—I know you are not—"

Her face was not the same; her hair was the deeper red of mahogany, her eyes as large, but of green, not blue. Dorothy's mouth was wider, her cheeks not quite so shadowed. Yet now her face was drawn in the look of bewilderment that he felt on his own.

"Doug?"

"Dot! For God's sake!"

"Your voice is the same—but you don't look like—"

"Don't get scared, take it easy. It's me. You're different too—"

all but your voice. I've got to figure it out. Everything's all wrong. Wrong as hell—"

He found a chair of light metal that felt like foam rubber when he sat on it. Dorothy—and he knew somehow that it must be Dorothy—was looking around her with quick, nervous glances.

"Doug, the boys—where are the boys?"

"Terry! Mikel!" He called again, stood up. "Oh, God—"

"They were just behind me, Doug, they couldn't have run—"

"No I think—I think they must've stayed with—with the Contraption. We were in the blur light. It wasn't. They must've been just beyond its effective range. That must be it. It just got us."

"Got us—you mean we're—"

"No, no of course not. Alive as we'll ever be. But where—"

"Wherever we are, I don't want to be here, Doug. I want to be back . . ."

"Easy, honey." He put his arm about her, drew her to him, and he could feel her taut muscles relax a little. "I'd like to say it's a dream, but two people don't dream the same dream at once. And I'm not the type to think up clothes like these all by myself . . . Somehow, the Contraption did it. I was monkeying with a theorem

"I got interested in once in space-time mechanics. But it was all on paper—just something to fool with. It was impossible for the Contraption to really do anything." He sat down again. "Impossible."

"Like flying, my mother used to say. What do we do, Doug?"

"That's my gal . . ." He got up a second time, forced a smile. "Let's go upstairs and see if anybody's around."

There were stairs. Wide and gently curving and constructed of a light, lusterless steel.

Architecturally, the house was little different from many of the expensive-looking California-type affairs he had seen in the women's magazines that Dot bought every so often. Yet there was something about its interior, a certain grace combined with a subtle simplicity that made it a work of art as a good painting or sculptural piece is art. There was rebellion in it—a gentle rebellion against the eye-aching extremes of artificial modernity, yet at the same time a freedom of execution that made the confines of formalized pattern seem childish.

The pastel carpeting was of a deep, soft substance that Doug recognized as a masterpiece in plastic; the furniture was simple, casual, but not stark and starved-looking. The rooms themselves



were ample and were as bright in the far corners as in those nearest the wide, sashless windows. They were not separated by partitions, but divided instead by a fragile-appearing tracery of lattice-work in which a decorative motif was woven with an almost fairy-like geometrical magic. The air was cool and fresh.

"Now I know I'm dreaming," Dot said in a low voice. They walked quietly, from room to room, listening, half-waiting. "I expect any minute to find three bowls of porridge somewhere," Dot said.

"I wonder . . ." Doug said. "What's here is—I think its ours. I think we live here."

"Doug look—through the window!"

HE saw a broad lawn of carefully trimmed yet almost ankle-deep grass, inset at the edges with a running garden. And the street beyond was wide, and there were other houses at its far side that looked much as he knew this one must appear. Roofs of tinted tiling, walls of delicately-toned glass brick, wide, gently-curving windows.

These Doug saw in the first instant, and then there were the soundless vehicles in the street.

"Like smooth, transparent walnut shells," Doug said. "Cooling

louvres in the back—engines in the rear. They know their engineering, too. Wonder if the body is some sort of transparent steel—"

"The people in them, Doug! Did you see them? Just like—"

"Like us, of course. Still expecting the three bears? He laughed a little. They were like children in some new fairyland, half afraid, half unbelieving. "Wherever we are, it's populated by humans—if it weren't, we may not have come out this way . . ."

"Doug, do you know?" She turned, faced him, and there was still fear deep in her eyes. Not the stark fear of terror, but the bewildered, uncomprehending fear of disbelief.

"No I don't. But these clothes aren't ours—even our faces, our bodies aren't. Just our actual selves came through unaltered. Our egos—personalities—whatever you want to call it that gives a human being his identity. The rest we've—moved into, I think. Anyway, it's a theory to go on. I wonder what our names are—"

"Doug, don't."

"I wish I were trying to be funny. But don't you see?"

"Whatever happened to us—couldn't that have changed us? Our—our atomic structure, couldn't that have been changed or altered somehow? It's all so crazy—"

"It's easy to see, m'girl, that you don't 'spend your time at a bridge table all those hours I'm slaving away on Madhouse Hill! But if that had happened . . . I don't know. It's the clothes. Too completely different—not just out of shape, or an altered shape, but of a fundamentally *different* shape. We got—we got transplanted."

"But then what of—"

"Thinking the same thing. Suppose the Contraption, whatever it's done—suppose it works *two* ways? A swap, a trade?"

"But Doug that's—"

He smiled. Dot was suddenly silent with the knowledge that whether she liked it or not, she could no longer refuse to accept the facts as they were, could no longer cross off their implications for want of bolder imagination.

"Are we—is it the . . . the future?"

"Maybe. You could even ask 'is this Earth?' and I couldn't tell you. I wonder what they think where *they* are . . . I wonder if *they* know."

"Doug, would they—do anything? To Terry and Mike, I mean?"

"I sure hope not—and I don't think so. The boys will be all right—they know their way around back home—whomever it is we've replaced is in the same boat we

are. They'd think more than twice before rashly committing themselves to trouble. They're probably trying to communicate with the kids—if the kids stuck around that long. I'm wondering more about the Contraption. If they start fooling with it . . ."

"Then we'd go back?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. I think though that they'd leave it alone, on the theory that whoever invented it knows its use, knows how to handle it safely. They'd be wrong, but I think that's how they'd figure it. I don't think any one'll dare touch it, simply out of sheer fear of what might happen next."

"I'm scared, Doug. Awful scared."

"I guess that makes two of us. Somehow we've got to dig up the parts for another Contraption. And then—" He let the sentence drift into silence.

"And then, Doug?"

"Well maybe with the exact same set-up—same everything, I could do it again. I don't know. But if they so much as try to turn the other one off, try to change anything, we'll lose this point of reference in space-time for good."

**S**LOWLY, Dot nodded under-standing. "The parts," she said then. "Can we find the things

you need?"

"I'll give it the old college try, sweetheart."

"How long—"

He shrugged. "A few days maybe. Depends."

They were silent for a moment, looking through the wide window, watching the beautiful vehicles as they slid silently past, re-examining what they could see of the colorful world beyond the rolling lawn. Doug felt an aching in his jaws, a tightness through his lips. God, it was so silly—standing there, trying to explain, when he didn't even know what had happened, where they were or—when they were. He'd been after travelling light to bring back pictures of the past—every home should have one. Nuts. The future—no, it wasn't supposed to be that way. Unless you accepted past, present and future as the components of one great unit, and progression from one to the other nothing more than illusion, like the illusion of movement given by the hundreds of still frames on a film-strip. If time was like such a film-strip, and you found a way to jump forward along it, bypassing the frames that were in immediate succession—

But then what about the possibility-probability pattern theory, in which time was supposed to exist as an infinite number of possi-

bility and probability paths, intersecting, paralleling, diverging, splitting with each new decision, each new action—Lord it was getting insane.

"Hell I'm all mixed up," he said. Dot put her arm through his. He nodded toward what was beyond the window. "We might as well have a look for ourselves. If anybody says anything to us we'll suddenly see something interesting in the other direction. Game?"

"I—I guess so . . ."

"Damn, I wish I had a cigarette!"

They went to the front door, swung it open.

THE streets were long and incredibly wide and straight, bearing their traffic smoothly and with hardly a hint of the inevitable jamming that was so familiar. The sidewalks were immaculately kept, yet surprisingly free of pedestrians; a few passed, bowed slightly and smiled, continued on.

"Polite bunch," Doug murmured. "They bow like good Republicans . . ."

"And all smiling—as if they didn't have a worry in the world."

"Democrats, then!" They laughed, and for a moment the anxiety was gone, and the street could have been any fine street in the world from which they'd come.

"We'd better try to find the center of town," Doug said then. "We've got to do a lot more than ogle if we want to locate the stuff we're after. Sshh . . ."

This time two women passed. They smiled, bowed, went on.

"Maybe you're the mayor of this town or something—at least an alderman."

"They wouldn't smile, honey! Anyway, there are three things we'd better figure. How to get money, how to get food, how to get the equipment. Any ideas?"

"We should've searched the house for a wallet or something. Or maybe these people don't believe in money—maybe they use a different system altogether."

"It's possible, of course, and—good night!" Doug was staring suddenly upward. There had been a low rumbling sound which within seconds had ascended the decibel scale to a throbbing roar. A great, tapering thing of silvery metal with no hint of wing-surfaces was bolting skyward, and Doug knew somehow that the sky was not its limit. The roar and scream of suddenly-split atmosphere subsided, and in moments, the vertically-climbing craft was out of sight. "They've done it here, Dot! I'd bet the bottom dollar I don't have that we've seen our first space-liner!"

"Could I have been right, Doug?

The future, I mean?"

"I don't know, Dot . . . I don't know."

There were towering buildings less than a half-mile from them of a simplicity and beauty that left no time for talk. The city was suddenly before them—a sparkling thing, unmarred by eye-stumbling bits and pieces—a flawless, symmetrical sweep toward the heavens that momentarily stupefied credulity. Traffic ramps soared from street-level in gently curving ribbons above spacious quiet parks; sound was muffled to near-inaudibility, and the illusion of a great fairy kingdom was unmarred by the confusion of advertising posters, marquees, store front lettering, or the raucous stampede of elbowing mobs . . .

"I wonder how they illuminate at night," Doug was saying. "I wonder what they—my God, Dot, look up—all over. Where is it?"

Far above, the sky seemed gradually to darken into an ever-deepening shadow of blackness. But the sun—She couldn't find the sun!

"It's a different planet, Doug!"

"And the city—it is lit! There must be a sun but it's down—it's night, and they've found a way to illuminate an entire city as though daylight were perpetual!"

And that was when it caught their eye. It was a small store,

and she could see neatly-tiered rows of groceries inside—fruits and vegetables were easily recognizable even the street's width from them. But it was the little rack outside the store—the one that held the newspapers.

Almost at a run they crossed the street, and Doug fought down the urge to reach out, grab one of the editions.

The front pages of the newspapers were easily readable. Because they were printed in excellent English.

The date beneath the masthead of one was April 17, 1958. The paper was the Washington Post.

### CHAPTER III

IT was light. Terry had been watching the darkness fade for about ten minutes, fascinated, because the diffused glow grew as though from nowhere, and he could not find the sun. At first he'd felt sort of scared, but nothing happened, so he'd kept watching, trying to find it.

He was still in bed. It was when he became aware that it wasn't his own bed that he sat up straight, wondering, trying to remember. He was in a long, narrow place, and there were a lot of beds—bunks, like his own, lining each side, end to end. Across

from him somebody else was sitting up. All the others were still asleep.

"Hey!" Terry called.

"Hey yourself! Who're you?" the other boy said.

"Terry Blair. What in the heck is this place? What's your name?" He had a funny feeling in his stomach, and he was hot and sweaty. He wanted to hear the other boy's voice again.

"Quit your kiddin'—Terry Blair's my brother!"

"What're you talking about, anyway?" Terry said, wondering if the other boy was trying to pick a fight. "I'm Terry Blair all right, and I know my brother when I see him! He's Mike Blair, and he don't look anything like you."

"Say who are you anyhow? Somebody tell you my name or something? You aren't awful funny."

"Neither are you, tryin' to imitate the way Mike talks."

There were stirrings in some of the other beds, and somebody mumbled "Pipe down!" Terry tried to be quiet getting out of the bunk. He stood up, felt a little light-headed, and walked over to the other's bed. He sat at its foot. The light feeling—and it seemed to be all over him now—wouldn't go away.

"Come on, don't be wise. What



is this place?"

"Don't be wise yourself! How should I know? Maybe it's a hospital. I must've got sick down cellar or something when Dad turned on the Contraption—"

"All that funny blue light," Terry said. "But how—"

Then they looked at each other. Hard.

"What d'you know about the blue light?" Mike asked.

"How d'you know about Dad and the Contraption?" Terry countered. "You spying from someplace?" Terry was on his feet and had both small fists clenched. "You get up out of there!"

"Wait up . . . maybe it put us to sleep, so this is all a dream, like. Nobody looks the same in dreams."

"You're crazy. They don't sound alike, and you're trying to sound like Mike . . ."

"You sound like Terry, too. You could all right in a dream, just like you know the same things. I'll tell you the first two numbers in the address of our house. If you can give me the last two, then we will know. And if you can't smart guy—"

"You don't even know the street we live on."

"It's Delaware, so how do you like that? And here's the first two numbers —2, 6—"

"8, 1—"

"What'd I tell you? It sure is a dream. You're Terry all right I guess and I'm me—Mike—but in a dream everybody always looks funny. You got black hair, all straight and cut short."

"You too. But guess you're Mike though, as long as it's a dream. Only I feel pretty real."

"Sure, me too. Sometimes dreams are like that. Just like for real."

"Well I hope we don't get into a nightmare. They make me sweat awful."

"I'm all sweaty now—so're you. It's sure hot around here. Where in heck d'you suppose we are, anyway?"

"You don't think Dad's thing killed us, and—and we're—"

"Naw—they wouldn't have beds or anything. Anyhow, Dad told us all about that once. There's no such place. It's got something to do with state of mind, whatever that is."

"Well we've been kinda bad every now and then just the same."

"Dad says that hasn't got anything to do with it, don't you remember? Nobody keeps books on you, like a report card, or anything. It's up to you, and you know how you feel about it inside. That's what he said, and I believe Dad. Dad's smart, Terry."

"Wish he was here too."

"Grown-ups got dreams of their own to worry about. You're not scared, are you?"

"Who me? Heck, no. Hey, have a look at the funny clothes hanging up at the side of our beds. Like riding pants, with wide black belts. Look, some belts got three little silver things in each side. And have a look at the boots! Hey, feel this one—light as anything."

"Who ever heard of blue riding pants? Besides you don't know how to ride a horse any more than I do."

"Bet I could though. Boy—"

"Hey, have a look out this window. You can see all over. Gosh, this must be the same kind of place all the other long ones are."

THE buildings were long and narrow with rounded, Quonset-type roofs. They were built end to end in long, dull-blue rows, and the grass that grew between them was of an exactly matching shade, tall, and lush. At precise intervals, the rows of buildings were interrupted by uncurbed streets of hard-packed, dull black dirt, and at the end of the widest was a field-like expanse trimmed to a perfect circle. The massive, glittering building in its center was immense. Varicolored banners flew from a trio of spires ris-

ing antenna-like from a single point atop the highest, oddly flat-topped turret. In the geometric center of the squat structure's otherwise unbroken curving front was a balcony, molded deftly into the severe sweeping architectural lines of which it was an integral, although predominating part. Beyond were rolling hills, and close above them, a foggy, blue-white sky.

Already waves of heat were beginning to shimmer from the triple turrets of the gold-hued colossus in the center of the great circle, and the banners above them were being whipped by stiff gusts that seemed to blow from several directions at once. Once or twice, there were flashes of lightning that split the low rolling bottom of the sky, but there were no gathering storm clouds, nor was there rain.

"Gosh," Terry said. "It sure is funny grass—"

A high, shrill sound suddenly pierced the stillness, and at its signal, youngsters, no older than themselves were stumbling from their narrow cots, yawning, standing.

"They're putting on their pants and boots. We better—" Mike was saying. Wide-eyed, they watched the others, carefully imitated them. There were no shirts to cover the young, sweating torsos,

and dressing was simple. Just the crisply-cut breeches, the light snug-fitting boots, and the black belts.

"You guys been assigned to a quadrant yet?"

Mike looked up. He was a taller boy, and looked a little older than the rest. He wore a gold star in his belt, and there were still-red scars across his chest and across one shoulder.

"I guess not," Mike said. "What's that? Quadrant, I mean?"

"How long have you been here, anyway? Thought you two came a couple of weeks ago. On the *Mikol VI*."

The twins looked at each other, then back to the tall, blonde boy.

"What's your name?" Terry asked.

"I'm Jon Tayne. Son of Quadrante Larsen Tayne. Your father's a general officer just like mine—that's why we can talk together out here. Otherwise we couldn't—part of the training, you know. Teaches you the undesirability of class-consciousness. I've been here two years—they tossed me back. Insufficient conditioning. But it doesn't matter to me—maybe you'll get as big a kick out of it as I do. I like it here. Not many do, though."

"It's sure different," Mike said, "but we haven't been here any two weeks, I don't think. Anyway it

hasn't seemed like that long, has it Terry?"

"Golly, I—"

"Terry? Thought you two were Kurt and Ronal Blair? Washington, western hemisphere north?"

"We live in Washington, that's for sure," Terry said. "But I'm—"

"Hey I know, Terry. It's all like we said, and here that's us. You can be Kurt. I'm Ronal. But don't get mixed up."

"Your father's Senior Quadrante Douglas Blair, isn't he?" the tall boy said.

"He's the Douglas Blair part, anyway," Mike said. "Makes I guess over thirteen thousand dollars a year, too."

"Say, you sure you're all right? I didn't think you were hit very hard in practice yesterday, but you talk as if you were. Thirteen thousand dollars is just about enough to buy a loaf of bread. Your father makes what mine does and what every other adult does—thirty billion dollars a year. Then after he contributes his dutiful share to the Prelatinate, he has a billions dollars left." Didn't you know that?"

"Gosh no. Not exactly, I mean."

"What's Prelatinate?" Terry asked.

"What's — listen, fellows — any one of us, even a Quadrante's son, can be turned into the Director for

saying a thing like that, even as a joke. Better watch it. If there's one thing you learn here, it's praise and respect for your government. They're pretty rough on sacrilege, I should think your father would have told you. My training was started when I was four, but you sound almost as though you haven't had any yet."

"I don't even remember when I was four," Mike said

"That doesn't matter. When an adult tells you something—"

The tall boy was interrupted then by a second sounding of the shrill signal, and at once, he hurried to the end of the building. The others fell in behind him in a column of threes. Mike and Terry took positions at the end of the column.

"Where are we going?"

"Breakfast, I hope!" Terry said. The tall boy pressed a stud in the wall, and the front door rolled back. Then he turned his head and belled "Section, *tench-hut!* Forward *march!*" And he sounded as though he enjoyed it.

They marched out, and, to Terry's gratification, it was to a huge, diamond-shaped building in which they found breakfast waiting.

It was during the rest period after the half-hour session of calisthenics that the *Mikol VII* landed. Terry and Mike had been

laying prostrate on the thickly-matted, damp blue grass, a little out of breath but strangely enough, little more fatigued than had they just finished a short inning of sandlot baseball. They both had been watching the milky-blue sky, and had chosen a place to rest somewhat apart from the others. There were hundreds and hundreds of the others in formations of their own, Terry had noticed, and all together he could only guess at how many there were. There was one adult in charge of all of them, but they had not seen him closely yet nor heard his voice.

Before the first sounds of thunder, Mike had been puzzling a lot of things at once.

"Did you ever jump so high before?"

"It really wasn't awful high. Higher, though I guess than ever before. Felt kind of funny, huh?"

"Sure did. Is it hard for you to walk?"

"We never played soldier much—you know how Dad felt about that. The other guys are pretty good at keeping the same step. We'll catch on, though."

"I didn't mean that. I didn't feel—well, heavy enough, sort of. I kinda bounce when I try to walk."

"Me too, but all dreams are funny. I suppose in a dream you could jump clear over the buildings

back there if you wanted to. Boy, wait'll we tell Dad about dreaming we're in a military school. He'll have a fit!"

"He sure will. Remember that time we asked him about it? I guess even Mom was surprised at how he flew up that way. He said if he hadn't thought he could teach us himself how to grow up good without putting us in uniforms to do it he'd never have had us. But it's kind of fun though. So far—"

That was when they heard the thundering sound almost directly above them, but it was like no thunder they had ever heard before. There was a sudden swirling of the thick sky above them, and they jumped up, rooted, watching.

The *Mikol VII* burst suddenly through the heavy clouds, its stern belching flame and rolling volumes of sound. The heavy air about them vibrated as they watched.

It looked like a huge, shining artillery shell, dropping groundward as though held in the grip of some great, invisible hand that slowed it, held it in perfect balance as it descended wrong-end first, directly above the circular place at the end of the long, broad street.

"Like a big V-2 going the wrong way!" Mike said.

"It's a space ship; that's what it is!" Terry yelled. "Comin' in to land. Just like in the movie we saw, Mike. Just like."

"Look, it's almost down—c'mon up on this little hill here. You can see 'em driving big trucks or something out to meet it. What do you suppose it's got?"

"Wonder where it's from? Mars, I bet."

"Hil! Pretty sight, isn't it?" It was the tall boy who led their section. He had his thumbs hooked in his belt just behind where the gold stars were.

"Sure is," Terry said, eyes glued to the towering craft which had just settled perfectly to the ground.

"It's the *Mikol VII*, and it's the last shipment before the games. Guess there'll be another ten thousand or so guys, and then we can start getting all our equipment issued. They don't give us our stuff until everybody's here. That's to make it so that we all have an absolutely equal amount of training. Watch—they're starting to come out now. Just the way you guys did when you came."

MIKE and Terry weren't listening. They watched as a great opening suddenly appeared near the ship's blunt stern, to which an inclined ramp was being towed by a tiny surface vehicle. Then they started coming out, five abreast, in seemingly unending numbers.

"They're still wearing civvies,"

the tall boy said. "They'll get their game issue tonight, though, and their equipment, along with us. Trucks drop it off at each barracks, and then it's given out by each section leader. I guess there must be tons of the stuff."

"Where they going now?"

As the youngsters poured from the *Mikol VII* they were grouped into formations by adults who had come from the huge, golden building.

"Why, to their barracks, just like everybody else does. They ate before they landed; and their barracks assignments were made at headquarters on Earth before they even took off."

"On Earth?"

"Sure, didn't you know that? Believe me, it has to be efficient. The Quadrates and their staffs work all year at headquarters getting things lined up for the games. They don't show up here until the day things start. The Director's here, but you only see him once, at the opening ceremonies. As far as the games are concerned, he ranks everybody—except the Pre-late-General, of course. He signs the orders that split us up into our quadrants."

"Hey, Jon . . ."

"You better call me lance-sergeant out here. Somebody could get the wrong idea."

"Sure, sarge! Is that what the

gold star means?"

"Uh huh. You get 'em if you volunteer. Like I did, before I was ten. Sets a good example, you know."

"Gee. Is everybody here our age?"

"Nobody can be more than a month over ten. That's the law. That is except for volunteers, who are younger, and those who get tossed back for insufficient conditioning and have to stay for the games all over again, like me. I was twelve a couple months ago. I like it though."

"But say, what'd you mean about Earth?"

"Well, that's where all the plans and everything are made before you even leave. You didn't think all that stuff was done here on Venus, did you?"

AS Jon had said, the trucks came with the loads of equipment for each barracks that night after supper. They were large, long trucks and Terry wondered why they didn't make the awful racket that trucks always made. There wasn't the stink of burned Diesel fuel. The huge vehicle just rolled up outside soundlessly, and Terry watched for the driver to get out. None did. He tried to look into the front of the vehicle, but it was too dark to see what was on the other side of the long,

narrow windows.

"Nothing in there," Jon said. "Those are just for maintenance inspection. It'd be a mess if the robot control ever went out of whack, believe me. Better start help unloading."

The unloading took less than fifteen minutes, and then the truck moved on to the next barracks. The rude, wooden crates were heavy, but not large. There were three for each of the hundred bunks.

When the last was placed at the foot of Jon's bunk, he stood on the largest one and told them what to do.

"I'll distribute a chisel to each of you," he said, "and as you open each box, place its contents on your bunk, so that it can be inspected for fitness before use."

"You will open the smallest box first. In it you will find your helmet and polishing kit. The helmet is to be kept shined at all times—if anybody's. Isn't it's ten demerits. Fifty, as you've all been told, and you get your records marked 'insufficient conditioning'. Your helmets may look heavy—on Earth they'd weigh about five pounds, but here they're just a little less than four. You'll get used to them."

"In the second box—the flat one—you'll find all your personal maintenance equipment. You should

have a whetstone, extra leather thongs, a set of files, and a small can of oil. They're to be kept in the condition which you find them, and will be worn at all times on the shoulder equipment sling which is in the third box."

"In the third box—the long, flat one, are your most important pieces of equipment. I'll show you how they attach to your arm belt. Needless to say, they must be kept thoroughly polished—and sharpened—at all times. Now I'll give out the chisels, and you can open the boxes."

They did. Terry and Mike helped each other when they got their chisels. They followed Jon's directions perfectly. First the helmet and the polishing kit. Then the whetstone, extra leather thongs, the set of files, the can of oil, and the shoulder equipment sling.

Then the eight-inch dagger, the two-foot spiked mace, and the double-edged broadsword . . .

## CHAPTER IV

THE price of the paper was \$3,000.

"Doug—do we dare—"

"No. We've only got a second or so, as though we were just interested passersby, looking at the headlines. Got to be careful."

PRELATINATE OKs MORE FUNDS FOR SCHOOLS the eight-



column streamer read. Doug scanned the two-column lead quickly.

"Washington, April, 17—(WP)—Prelate General Wendel announced through his press headquarters here tonight that both houses of the Prelatinate have unanimously voted to grant the request of the Council of Education, 27th Department, for seven trillion dollars in additional funds for school building. The funds will be used for the replacement of 34 outmoded buildings in the Department, the newest of which, it was said, is more than 12 years old. The Council's original request for five trillion dollars was increased by the Prelatinate to seven trillion in recognition of—"

*Good-Lord, he thought, good Lord...*

*City Cabinet Praises Mayor On Budget Expansion...*

*Area Industries Vote Shorter Work Week...*

*Liberals, Conservatives In Accord On Labor Issue...*

*S-Council Reports Second Arrest In Four Years...*

*Veteran Civic Leader Admits Wisdom Of Youth Group's Plan...*

"Doug—oh Doug, none of this can be real..."

"We'd better go. Back to the house. And take it easy, lady..." He managed to grin a little.

No one passed them on the walk

back, but Dot clung close to him as they walked, as though the mature years since college had never been, as though simple happiness were again all that mattered.

The mature years...

Doug wondered. Somewhere, he had always known, there was the place between resigned acceptance of things as they were and perpetual refusal to recognize a condition for what it was. Somewhere, happiness was a simple, honest thing, uncomplicated by the devious machinations of sadistic moral codes that would make a struggle of that right. Somewhere there was meaning to action, and the hypocrite was at last fallen from the mocking pedestal of lip-service righteousness.

Somewhere, perhaps long ago, a man had said "I question" even as, at the same time, another had said "I condemn" and another had said "I follow". Thus far, had they travelled the same road, but here, the road was forked. One was a wide path. One an aimless twisting thing that had no destination. The other, narrow, and ever narrower as it progressed. And there would be other forks, other paths, that split and re-split as they tracked the infinite reaches of time itself...

He remembered the first thing he'd learned in his first plunge into space-mechanics research. *Space*

*cannot exist without time; time cannot exist without space. Space-time, then, is the fabric of the Universe.*

So the threads were real. As real as the fact that one day in his life, he had decided to study law rather than to continue as a physicist. There had suddenly been a new split in the thread, and he chose, and had become an attorney, and then a man of politics.

What had Carl said? "... you'd've made that try for the moon a success last month instead of another near-miss . . ."

And how many other might-have-beens could there be?

*We conceive of Time, as it is integral with the structure of Space, an infinite . . .* The second thing he had learned.

And therefore—therefore each thread of might-have-been, unto itself, was.

*Somewhere, there was a Congressman named Douglas Blair. Somewhere, there was an astrophysicist, an artist, a sculptor, a writer, a cab-driver, a general, a sailor, a doctor, a thief, perhaps even a corpse named Douglas Blair . . .*

"I know," he said to the woman at his side then. "Dorothy, I think I know."

They entered the beautiful house set far back from a wide, beautiful highway on a lush, beau-

tiful lawn.

And he tried to explain, until he thought she understood.

He was tired, then. She located food in the house, and he found money in a wallet in which the identification card said simply Douglas Blair, Senior Quadrante of Games.

But everything was changed—everything. Not just himself, not just Dorothy. A whole world. All on another thread, that had started back somewhere, much further back. Through history, there had been so many ifs . . .

In a little while she lay beside him, and they slept.

THEY had intended to begin the search for materials to build another contraption, but before he was fully dressed, from somewhere, there was a soft tinkling sound. It was repeated, signal-like, from a far corner of the room. It came from what could only have been an extremely simplified, compact version of the telephone, installed integrally with the ample arm of a lounging chair.

"Shall I?" he hesitated.

"Be careful . . ."

Doug lifted the slender receiver. "Blair," he said.

"Quardate Blair, sorry, sir, that the liberty was taken to disturb you at your home. However, because of the urgency of this morn-

ing's conference at your offices, it was considered wise to remind you of the time it is planned to convene, as per Instruction 43-A. May you be expected at 1100 hours, sir?"

He dared not hesitate.

"Yes, yes of course." The voice he answered was a woman's.

"Will you wish the 'copter as usual, sir?"

"Why—yes of course, as usual. Thank you . . . ." He hung up quickly. Dot was looking at him with the question held at her lips.

"I'm expected at some sort of high-powered pow-wow in—" he glanced at a delicate clock inset in the chair's opposite arm, "—less than a half-hour. They're sending a 'copter for me. God knows what will happen if I don't show up."

And, he observed to himself, only God knew what would happen when he did.

## CHAPTER V

**W**HEN the 'copter swished to a feather-like landing on the wide expanse of the front lawn, Doug was ready. He had dressed himself in one of the dozen uniforms he had found arrayed in neat order in a full-length bedroom closet. He fastened the cape at his throat, wished suddenly that there was some way he could take Dot with him.

Suddenly she was in his arms, and Doug could feel her tremble.

"Don't worry, honey," Doug said. He opened the door. "So far it looks pretty civilized—hell, they couldn't be any worse than the quaint little tribe of cut-throats back home! Matter of fact, if I thought for a minute anyone here'd believe me—"

"Better not, Doug."

"Not a chance. I'm still one of Our Crowd—I don't trust anybody! And don't you—Stay put right here 'til I'm back, understand?"

He kissed her, then walked across the lawn to the idling helicopter.

It was empty.

He got inside, then saw the red button with the one word RETURN under it. He punched it.

Effortlessly, the robot controlled craft lifted, wafted him in seconds high above the city. Its rise stopped at what he judged was about 1,000 feet, then proceeded on a course of its own.

"Wonderful, these dreamers," he muttered, and became engrossed in study of the fabulous city below him.

There was no capitol dome, nor could he find the Washington monument. But there was still the Potomac, and there were the cherry blossoms.

Then the city became little

more than a rolling pattern of line and color to him, and the thoughts began coming quickly, intensely. An excuse for the difference in his voice—did people here have colds? The uniform—suppose something were wrong . . . and his own mannerisms—how closely would he resemble, under the close scrutiny of the few there must be who knew him well, the man whom he'd replaced—the other Douglas Blair, who must at this instant be facing the same problem in a world as alien to him as this was to Congressman Douglas Blair? The woman on the phone had said "Your offices"—his meeting, then, and they'd ask questions.

He'd been a fool. He'd never carry it off in a million years! They were smart—even a half-intelligent person of his own world could spot the eternal phony trying to bluff for what just wasn't there, even in the guy who'd learned how from the right books. Hell, he'd be as transparent as manners at a pink tea.

HE wondered about the other Douglas Blair, and how the trap felt that had snapped on him. About the kids—what about his kids? Terry was a smart boy and he'd know the Contraption had been responsible for what had happened. Would he try to get hold of Carl or somebody? If a bunch

of technicians or even scientists got to the Contraption, touched anything . . . There would be no knowing about that until they tried to get back. Either the reference frame would be the same or, if someone had tampered, it would be completely altered, and Dot and himself would go from one time thread to the next, *ad infinitum*, with finding their own again as probable as finding a specific grain of sand in the Sahara.

The other Douglas Blair. And of course, his wife. He knew what they looked like—she would have Dot's slenderness, her face, eyes, hair . . . No one would know. And the man would look like himself. Suppose even the kids didn't know? Doug wondered if they'd fool the kids . . . And then—then what? No one would know, but that was a joke. They wouldn't believe it if his alter-ego got to a microphone and broadcast it. People only believed in gossip, in rumor, in the miracles of wishful thinking. They never believed in facts. They accepted them, but they were not convinced. Newspapers would publish accounts of dolls that wept, but carefully steered clear of the scientific phenomenon if it were not between governmental quotation marks. It was true of course—mystery, properly interpreted, could not hurt. A fact de-

fied interpretation; in the final analysis, it must be taken or left. And when it was a fact strange to the beliefs of men, it was left for as long a period as curiosity would permit. And then, of course, misunderstood.

He wondered how the other Douglas Blair would manage, and what, upon realizing that his was the superior intelligence and knowledge, he would do with it . . .

The 'copter had begun to lose altitude and the flat expanse of a large roof below was its destination. Its edges were lined with other 'copters, hangars, servicing equipment, men. While he watched a pilotless ship gently rose into a flight pattern above the roof toward which he descended. Another was descending toward it even as he was, from slightly above and from the east.

And then there were little cold, stabbing fingers of panic inside him, squeezing, twisting his vitals.

*Relax, mister.*

Now it was no longer a pleasantly fantastic detached stage setting, with red exit lights glowing reassuringly somewhere off in the shadows of reality. Quite painfully, he felt the chiding slap of reality across his face.

And it hurt.

*Forget about the Contraption, forget about the smart guys, and*

*their smart little world—their little dung-heaps of stupidity and moral cannibalism you've had the colossal luck to escape . . .*

*Can't do it? That's right—the kids, of course . . .*

*Sure, but old Mother Nature takes care of that, doesn't she? When your kids are lying dead on some foreign battlefield you can have more . . . That's why life's cheap, old man . . . Nature doesn't care—she'll keep supplying and supplying as long as there are fools enough to flood the market. And you have your woman, if it's kids you want . . .*

*It's a clean slate . . . Pick up the chalk—*

*But you couldn't name them Mike and Terry, dammit, you couldn't!*

The 'copter's landing-gear touched.

Its blades were still slowing as the two uniformed men appeared beside it, opened the small door. Doug climbed out, and the two stood at attention, each right palm open and raised. He understood. The universal gesture for peace—a salute. An odd gesture to replace the mock-shielding of the eyes against the glitter of a nobleman's shiny battle armor!

He returned it, and they fell in at his side to escort him across the landing roof to an opening entrance,

cloaks swirling gently behind them in the bright morning sunlight.

HE entered the chamber still flanked by the orderlies. There were nine men and a woman about the circumference of the long, elliptical conference table, and they stood as though brought erect by a common puppet-string as he came through the wide door.

The vacant chair was at the far end of the table. Silently, he was escorted to it, seated. The others bowed with but a hint of movement toward him, then seated themselves. The orderlies withdrew, and the softly curved walls seemed to grow in upon themselves as the wide doorway through which he had come soundlessly disappeared.

Here they were, then. Ten people whom he did not know, called to conference for the discussion of some supposedly vital situation of which he had not the slightest inkling. And he had apparently called it, so the talking was up to him.

It would mean discovery before he had said ten words.

As they sat, his eyes swept from one to the next in unhesitating succession.

The woman, next to him, was clothed as Dot had been. He had seen many less attractive. Of the

men, three obviously outranked the remaining six, who would have looked, were it not for the too-serious set of their faces, like college athletes. Their three superiors, he judged, were nearer his own age. The markings at the collars of their blue cloaks were identical with his own, with the exception that they were executed in red rather than in white. Four identical insignia—four identical commands then.

The term Quadrate was at once self-explanatory. Somewhere, there were four great armies . . .

And he, apparently, held power of decision over them all. What colossal thing surged one way or the other at his order? And—who or what, in turn, ordered him?

Now they were seated, waiting.

*You should've run, you should've run . . . What'd you think it was, just a dream with the label "Impossible" stuck on it? How long did you think you could deny the reality of what you knew was real? How deep do you have to get into a mess before you're convinced you don't come equipped with a guardian angel, a \$64 miracle that'll just take you over and bail you out when the going gets rough enough? Charms and such went out with the Dark Ages, mister . . . Or didn't anybody ever tell you?*

"... Gentlemen, you of course know why you're here. . . ."*That's the idea! After all, you learned the old double-talk technique a long time ago—Congressman.* "Therefore: perhaps it will be best to reverse the usual question and answer procedure; I shall hear your questions and opinions on the matter first, then present my own. Proceed . . ."

The girl was writing.

The others seemed to be swallowing it.

"Quadrade Blair," the tallest of the three said abruptly. "Frankly, we were hoping you might lay the matter open in this way! I don't intend to speak for Quadrade Tayne and Quadrade Klauss, but I think they have felt the same as I. Is it to be our understanding that we are to receive no OP for this year's games? I for one would be the first to grant that our over-all system, developed since the days of the Sahara as it has been, is well perfected, as nearly without flaw as is possible to make it. Yet the burden of detail is always with us. It is the small details, after all, each built on each, that have brought us to the high level we've achieved. There has always been room for correction, for experiment, for change. Therefore I, and I think here I may speak for the others, am puzzled that, with

the first phase of the games but a week hence, we have received nothing—and there were details of last year's Operational Procedure that I know Quadrade Klauss as well as myself felt should have been further examined in the field. The boys themselves keep developing new techniques—one tells the other, a brother, a friend — and we must make it our business to keep abreast of them, or we'll find ourselves in the midst of a confusion that could conceivably assail the very psychological foundations upon which our civilization is built!"

THE one called Klauss rose then. He had a more soldierly carriage than the first man, but he was not as tall. His tone was more conservative, yet of a more subtle firmness. And Doug listened. It was the only way in which he might gain some hint, some shadow of an idea of what these impossible men were talking about.

"Would you answer one question, sir?" the Quadrade named Klauss said. "Is the Director's word on this thing final? I ask this since if there is still the possibility of discussing further any or all of the procedure amendments proposed in our check lists . . ."

The words meant nothing. So



far so good, but it was just stalling—he'd succeeded in gaining time, but when they were finished, they'd expect some sort of decision, and then a follow-through.

Dammit, he was balled up! Somehow maybe he could fake long enough to get the materials, build the Contraption and get out. A tele-radio machine he had examined in the house while Dot slept might provide some of the needed material, but not the vital stuff. He would order that from a government supply office as soon as he returned to the house. His rank should be sufficient to get him what he needed without questions being asked. The Earth he knew with all its clatter of empty heads, its life-long familiarity—Terry and Mike were there. Or this world of seeming intelligence, efficiency, forthright honesty of conviction? Was there a choice?

The girl beside him moved in her chair. Recording secretary, of course. She would know. Everything—

*How many times have you dreamed of a world like this? Don't be a fool . . .*

“—and I therefore submit, sir, that unless final decision has been made by the Director, we further discuss the expedited drafting of the new OP for this year, based on the details enumerated in our check-

lists.”

The third one rose, the one referred to as Tayne.

There was something in the look of the man that brought Doug at once on guard. Wide face and shoulders, sharp, small features that gave his face a curious look of flatness, small eyes. The eyes bored in as though they could see through Doug's body and into his brain, examine it, and find it an imposter.

“I think the Senior Quadrate will agree,” he said, “that each time the games are conducted, it must be according to a plan which is as closely fool-proof as is possible to make it. I think he will agree that personal feelings have no place in the formulation of such plans—or their lack of formulation.”

All eyes were suddenly on Doug, and he knew that here was a challenge—that here was something the others had wished to say, but had considered the risk too great.

“Continue,” he said.

“I ask, in the interests of the Council, what the Senior Quadrate's real reason is for having delayed the revised OP for so protracted a length of time. I am not in position to demand an answer, but I point out that I ask the question as an alternative to filing a formal charge of outright

profligacy in office!"

THE sharp intakes of breath about the table were his cue. Even the girl hesitated the space of a second in her transcription. Suddenly, the thing was obvious. And Doug knew he could cope with it—he had, so many times before!

*This lad, he thought, wants to be the next Senior Quadrate!*

"It seems," he said, "the Quadrate has forgotten that the Council table is not intended as a political arena. He will be seated."

Tayne reddened. But he did not sit.

"The Director be praised but it's time we got to the bottom of this! Is it not true, Quadrate Blair, that the OP is being delayed so that whole sections may be entirely revised—in order to conform to your personal beliefs concerning what you term efficiency of equipment, on which we hear you expound so often? I suggest sir that you are grossly overstepping your authority! I doubt seriously that our check-lists have even been consulted! The Senior Quadrate would accuse me of seeking his position—I'm aware of that—but I ask him point-blank of his own ambitions toward the Directorate!"

There was but an instant of si-

lence; the Council was stunned. Doug felt cold little drops of sweat rolling down the undersides of his arms. What now? Was he supposed to shoot the man on the spot? Fire him, what? He turned to the girl.

"You will make extra copies of the Quadrate's remarks for the— the Director's personal file. Forward them to his headquarters as soon following adjournment of this session as is possible." She nodded. He was still doing it right. But luck wasn't a consistent thing. "Until the Director clarifies the status of Quadrate Tayne, pending his review of this report of his insubordinate charges and my own recommendations for the severest penalty the law allows for such insubordination, we will consider the conference adjourned, gentlemen . . ."

They stood at once, bowed, and flanked by their junior officers filed silently out.

Doug remained seated. The secretary was gathering her equipment. He dared ask her—what?

She startled him when she spoke.

"I'll get the transcription coded and prepared for A priority transmission on the first open Venus channel. But if I may say so, sir—not that he certainly hasn't deserved it ever since his brother got him appointed—it's too bad you

could not have found some other way—I've always marvelled at the methods you've been able to devise to cope with him in the past. This was—but pardon me. I'm entirely out of place."

"No, no it's all right. His brother?"

"Why—yes of course, Gundar Tayne. The Director."

## CHAPTER VI

HE had thought like a child to have believed he could have done more than bluff. He had thought like a child to have taken the impossible gamble at all. Already he had committed a fatal error, and he knew that were it not for his physical appearance the farce would not have lasted ten seconds.

Nonsense! Was not a high stake worth the toss of any dice? Perhaps he was slightly mad, but he had *not* thought like a child. Slightly mad, mad enough to suppose that to win happiness there must be courage, and with the courage, success, somehow:

He could feel the solidity of the corridor floor beneath his feet as he followed her toward the panel at its end upon which the words Office Of The Senior Quadrate stood boldly, with the insignia of the office inscribed beneath them.

Fatal error be damned!

He would satisfy Tayne! As soon as the panel of the large, private office slid shut behind them, he would countermand his order to the secretary and have her scrap the section of her records which was so much more damning to himself than it could ever be to Tayne. There would be some other way . . .

Yes, it was politics. But it was the only weapon he knew, and for the moment he would have to wield it more skillfully than he ever had in his life.

And idly, he wondered what they would do if he failed. If, somehow they saw through the disguise of his body . . .

He knew what they would do. They would make him build a new Contraption, make him go. And the Contraption they would make him build—there was of course too great a chance that he and Dorothy would miss their own point in time, become hopelessly lost . . .

And wouldn't it be sheer idiocy to risk that?

THE office was a miniature of the council chamber. It was elliptical, furnished with two desks of smooth, soft-finished metal molded to fit the general configurations of the chamber itself, and planned for both business-like effi-

ciency and personal comfort. The name-plate on the larger desk bore his insignia and said Douglas J. Blair; that on the smaller said Miss Jane Landis.

He seated himself.

"Miss Landis, about that report to the Director. Perhaps — perhaps as you suggested, it was in, shall we say, bad taste. Better file it. Future reference."

"Why Doug—what on Earth's the matter?" She put the recording device on her desk, walked over to his. There was a look of concern on her face that he didn't understand. What had he said wrong now? Whatever it was, there was no hint of suspicion in her look, only a vague puzzlement.

Young, and pretty. A trap, perhaps—no, they hadn't tumbled yet. Perhaps just Nature's own trap and that was all. Funny, Doug thought, very funny. There were rules. Sometimes you were supposed to be thankful to Nature, worship her, hold her in awe—and other times, you were supposed to completely deny that she existed, and villify her if she had done too good a job. She had done a good job on Miss Landis.

"Why, nothing. It is simply that—"

"But why the 'Miss' Landis? Did I do something wrong? And the way you just went over and

sat down . . . ."

"Sorry . . . sorry, Jane." He smiled. "It's Tayne. I think I handled him rather badly."

"Don't worry so, Doug! I've never seen such a little thing get under your skin. Everyone knows he never got properly conditioned, even the Director himself. He's a good games officer, and that's that. He's always trying to draw someone into a state of anger, and you told me yourself just yesterday that you're his special target just for the job. It's a good thing you didn't blow up in there. What came over you—giving an order like that, I mean?"

"I—let's say I was confused for the moment."

"As long as he's the only headquarters man like that there's nothing to keep you so upset, Doug. Now come on—"

She was behind the desk, a slender hand on the back of his chair.

"Not—no not now Jane. Anyway you should appreciate my—"

"Your position . . . yes . . . But Lisa's not the jealous sort Doug, you know that. Your wife's always been willing to share you with others . . . ."

"I—yes I know that of course . . . ." *Good Lord . . . .*

He hadn't even thought of it, hadn't been ready. The entire setup of conventions would of course

have so many differences—what was simple bad taste in his time-phase might be accepted as a matter of course here. And vice-versa perhaps—how was hé to know? And he would have to know.

"Doug . . ."

He said nothing, and she withdrew a little.

"Doug I'm sorry about getting out of line when I said what I did about the way you handled Tayne, if that's what it is . . . I know my business and I know yours . . ."

He remained silent, and she left his side of the desk.

He tried to think, tried to remember the early days in the courtroom. And he must say something quickly—

"No—no honestly I'm glad you said it. After all, how long have we known each other, Jane?"

"Ever since—ever since your election to the Quadrature almost ten years ago."

"Yes—it's a long time, isn't it? Tell me, had you ever known anything about me before then?"

"Why, only your name, your accomplishments. Your work for the great cause of politics and government as a journalist. I read a lot of your work. I thought there was never a man more devoted to his party since the formation of the Prelatinate itself. You were a great man then just as

you are now, Doug—and you're third in worship only to the Prelate General himself."

"Worship . . . you mean public admiration, respect . . ."

"Doug, how can you say such a thing? It's like—well, as if they'd said years ago that they—that they admired or respected their God!"

He felt the muscles in his jaw slacken, caught them.

"There's been a lot of progress since that era, of course. A lot of hard, exhausting work . . ." He was careful, lest any of his question-marks show. At any moment he could imagine her whirling upon him, shrieking "Imposter!"

But she was taking the bait.

"It seems impossible that there could ever have been a way of life without the Prelatinate, the Quadrature. Impossible even that there was once such a thing as war. How terrible it must have been—no conditioning, the constant killing of valuable adults . . ."

HE let her words sink into his memory, pushed them, crammed them into it, then tried to make them follow through.

"Ironic, isn't it, that without such beastiality there might never have been a world as we know it now. I sometimes wonder how often they thought about the fu-

ture—if they thought about it as we do today. You know, Jane, I think about the future a lot. Remember what we were talking about just the other day—a week or so ago, wasn't it?"

And he waited, tensed. Too far, perhaps—

"Doug—Doug you mustn't talk about that any more! The S-Council would have both of us in a minute if they ever heard us. The boys in white have sterilized people for less than talking about the desirability of inter-political marriages. But God, how I wish I'd been brought up a Liberal! Lisa wouldn't have had a chance!"

"I suppose it would've made the children a problem . . ."

"An understatement if I ever heard one! Your twin sons—I bet they're good solid Liberals by now! Do they—do they ever question, Doug? I've often wondered about kids, brought up in the family party from the time they're old enough to say 'Prelatinate'. Have Kurt and Ronal ever—do they ever show a streak of heresy—you know what I mean . . . I should think kids'd rebel, try out some ideas of their own."

"Well, did you ever, when you were a child?"

"No—no I guess not. I see what you mean. If you come out with a really good question, there's

always an answer for you right out of the Constitutional Commandments."

"And of course no one dares challenge them!"

"Doug!"

"Oh, don't misunderstand, Jane." Almost, that time. He could feel the sweat start under his arms again. Dammit what an organization. They worshipped government, they were scrupulously careful to keep a perfect check-and-balance on political spheres of influence, they had such well-oiled machinery that even war was impossible.

"Don't worry, I don't."

"I just meant that sometimes it really makes me realize what a wonderful balance we've achieved. Education, population."

"No form of birth control could ever have solved the problems of overcrowding and starvation and war as well as the games. You should know! Without work like yours, Doug, just think what the whole world could be like! There'd be the problem of enforcing the birth control laws again, knowing that every time they were violated the threat of unbalance would grow a little more."

The games again. What kind of magic, what kind of panacea were they? He thought of the teeming, overcrowded millions in Eur-

ope, Asia—World War I, World War II, Korea, the Puerto Rican revolution in 1955. New York and her East Side slums, Chicago, and—whatever it was he headed, it solved these things.

"Guess I'd better get back to the big job," he said then. "—Or Tayne'll be your new boss! And then—"

"Doug what a perfectly awful thing to say! You've got to stop worrying. Sometimes you're hardly yourself—honestly, if I didn't know you better I'd think you'd lost the old self-confidence, the old strut! Your voice even sounds kind of different. You've got to relax, mister."

"When I get things taken care of, maybe then . . . And I think—I think I can give them something they can't say no to if I go over every detail once more—a whole re-study." He watched her face closely, nerves taut for the first tell-tale sign that he'd fallen on his face. But she nodded.

"Probably help. Shall I bring in the whole file for last year? Check-lists, film-strips, the works?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. That's what I want—the works."

NEATLY lettered on the file-tab of the heavy folder she brought were the words WAR GAMES, 1957, and he did not

understand.

*War Games, and she had said there was no war . . .*

Suddenly, he was afraid. Afraid to reach inside the folder, afraid to find what would tell him that for some fearful reason she had lied, that this beautiful, sparkling world was nothing but a lie . . .

He read the file-tab again. WAR GAMES, 1957, it said. No—he did not understand.

He drew out the four thick volumes of bound records, the square can containing the film strips, the thin sheaf of check-lists.

And he opened the personal record titled *Senior Quadrant's Report. May 1, 1957-May 7, 1957. Blair.*

And simply, directly, it began on the first page.

*Subject: War Games, 1957: Notes.*

*Location: Venus, northern mass, west: N Lat. 38° 24' to N Lat. 37° 12'—E Long. 41° 6' to E. Long 39° 12'.*

*Force: 1,231,693.*

*Age range: Reg. 10 yrs. 1 mo. to 10 yrs. 4 mos. Av: 10 yrs. 2½ mos.*

*Mortality: 483,912.*

*Wounded In Action (Retrieved): 202,516.*

*Balance: Minus 200 M; plus 173 WIA.*

*Remarks: Within forgiveness*



margin.

Conditioning: 3% held over.

Personal observation: Full month training period completed by entire quadrant. For male children of the 10-year age level, exceptionally excellent military discipline this year. From what I witnessed of the quadrants under Tayne, Klauss and Vladkow, they have experienced the same good results. Despite use of outmoded weapons, combat exceptionally vigorous, well-executed and effective. This was especially true in final phase, with all quadrants meeting on common front, nothern mass (See map, Final Phase,) at which time 692,511 were committed. Full day rest allowed all quadrants during transfer from southwestern mass of quadrants 2 and 4.

Klauss is to be especially commended for this thoroughness in psychologically preparing his quadrant. Each of its members seemed completely convinced that battle was necessary to survival; I assume Klauss' extraordinary success may be laid to a great extent on his expert use of the propaganda techniques so successful in the World War.

Tayne is also to be commended, as is Vladkow, for having trained his quadrant to an admirably high degree of technical proficiency with both broadsword and mace. (See

Recommendations, Final Report.)

Removal of dead done with somewhat lower expedience than usual in all quadrants, due, however to the increased vigor on numerous occasions to . . .

Doug shut his eyes.

No. No, none of this was so. None of it . . .

"Jane!"

"Yes, Doug. Something—"

"I want to see the strips—now, if possible."

"Hit on something already?"

"The strips I said! Now!"

"Of course—right away, Doug." She pressed a stud in a panel flush with the desk-top. He knew he had startled her.

But he had to see. If he could see, he'd understand. The words had made no sense at all, they were gibberish, crazy and he didn't know what they meant.

HE held his muscles rigid as he waited for the orderly she had summoned to prepare the recessed projector, inset wall-screen. *Hurry, damn you, hurry!*

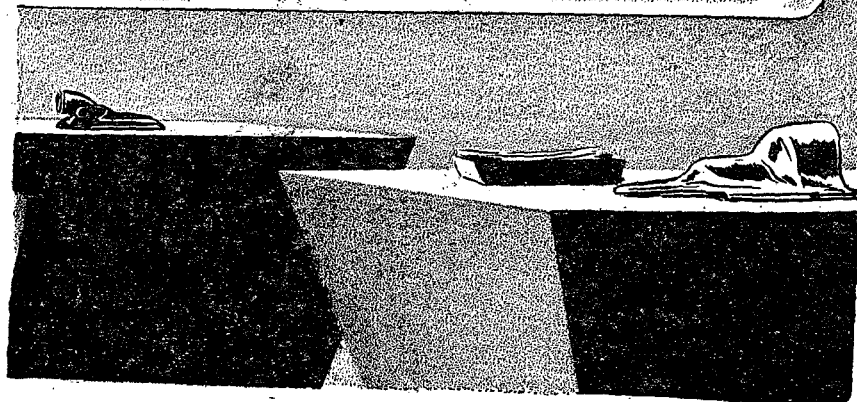
"Verbal commentary desired, sir?"

"Oh—yes, yes of course."

"All ready then, sir."

"Go ahead then, go on."

The suffused lighting of the chamber suddenly dimmed, and Jane rose from her desk.



"I'll be in the eightieth level records library, sir, if I'm needed."

"I don't—well if you wish, Miss Landis." She left. Because she knew—yes, of course she'd known what was coming. And she had left—

In full color, the pictures flashed on the screen.

He watched, only subconsciously aware of the intermittent voice describing, evaluating, analyzing. He sat and watched as though there were not a mobile muscle in his sweating body.

*Ten-year-old children, somewhere beneath a fantastic milk-white sky, painting an impossible*

*blue plain with the red of their own blood . . .*

The broadswords rose and fell with a savagery unknown to any but the ancient Turk, Mongol, Spartan. They glinted strangely in a daylight where there was no sun, and the piked maces swung in circles of red horror as they tore, smashed, at young, half-naked bodies . . .

They swarmed across the wide, flat expanses of bush, blue grass, and the cries that issued from their throats as they charged like hunger-crazed beasts into the sword-points of their opponents were mercifully deleted; the mad-



dened distortion of the features on their white, young faces was enough.

The voice explained, pointed out, reconciled pre-calculated plans with facts as they transpired.

The masses of mangled young flesh surged now forward now back, to either side; swelled, bunched, drove, fell writhing . . .

He saw a head fall, a running body split in two down the back.

"That's all, that's *all!*"

There was bitter stuff in his throat and he fought to keep the violent sickness bottled inside him.

"Yes, yes sir."

*No no no no no!*

THE illumination had returned fully when Tayne walked in, saluted loosely. He carried something in his right hand.

"Yes?"

"There's been an alteration in our rosters—Old Man himself, I had nothing to do with it. Here."

Senses still numbed, he took the thin plastisheets. He tried to get the words to make sense. Subject, transfer, quadrant 3 to quadrant 1, attention, Quadrates concerned.

"Apparently the Director thought it would be better this way. For myself, I don't see that it could make any actual difference."

What was the man saying? What did—there it was. Ronal Blair,

Kurt Blair: quadrant 3, Blair, to quadrant 1, Tayne. By Command: Gundar Tayne, Director . . .

His thoughts spun dizzily. *Mike, Terry — no, those were not the names. The other Blair's sons . . . This time, thank God, the other Blair's sons . . .*

## CHAPTER VII

"I AM apparently a relatively high official in the government. It is called a Congressman. Although there are many others of equal and superior rank, I am well liked. I have a strong political following."

"Was there any suspicion?"

"None at all. I had the good fortune, almost immediately upon discovering my role in this civilization, to gain access to a number of speech recordings our host had made. His voice is very little different than mine, and of course within about thirty minutes I had mastered his tone, his inflection, and his manner of speech. We shall have little or no difficulty."

They were seated in the living room of the house; in its den, two young boys were diligently working at the task their father had set them. The books were opened in an orderly array on the wide, polished floor. One read excerpts from the texts as the other quick-

ly gained mastery of a portable typewriter, transcribed as his brother read aloud.

"Father was correct in his reasoning . . . take this . . . *with the desertion by Germany of the League of Nations, the stage for World War II was set. Failure of the Weimar Republic . . .*"

Their sheaf of notes had grown measurably in thickness since the first fact had been written on the first page the night before. The boy had written it slowly as he had begun mastery of the awkward writing machine—1. *Washington defeats Cornwallis at Yorktown, Oct. 19, 1781 . . .*

In the living room, the woman was listening to her husband.

"By their standards, we would seem as improbable in our psychological reactions, our reasoning and our way of life as they seem under-developed and generally inferior in intelligence to our eyes. When you're among them, Lisa, you will have to guard against the self-assurance which to them could be easily interpreted as lack of emotion. Under any but the most intimate circumstances, we might appear to them as some sort of thinking machinery devoid of what they term 'character' and 'personality'. Other than that, you should have little trouble. If you should err through some lack

of detailed knowledge, you will find it amazingly easy to cover up." He toyed with a cigarette in a momentary attempt to deduce its function. He broke it in two, examined the tobacco grains as she spoke. Her voice was quiet, almost as though consciously held in check by some secret restraint.

"From your description, these people can be dealt with more or less at the mental level of a child of eight, then . . ."

"A child of about 13, on their standards. Not in individual cases, however—you will have to judge quickly for yourself. There are many who approach us in mental agility. I believe, from what I've been able to discover during the last few hours, that our host was one of those. There are few others of his rank, however, who are his equal."

"That would account for the apparatus." And then in a different voice and quite suddenly she said, "Dare we not use it, Douglas, and —"

"And what? Lisa, sometimes I think I don't understand you at all. You seem frightened, I think. Are you frightened?"

"No. No, Douglas."

"That's better. At any rate, we will do best to leave his apparatus absolutely unmolested. Here, apparently, science is not a re-

stricted thing, in the sense that the individual is not limited by law in its study and practice. Technological secrets of the government are of course carefully guarded, and periodically divulged to the public in vague or distorted form. However, the individual may be a free agent in science to the limit of his wealth, interest and intellectual ability. That is why our host was able to complete a project similar to that upon which Zercheq was at work when he was apprehended. Although even my technical training at Quadrature Academy excluded detailed study of space-time mechanics just as it did nuclear fission, I'm quite positive that our host has constructed a successful Chronospan, as Zercheq called it. If we tamper with it, his chances of returning here and ours of returning to our phase in time are reduced to absolute zero. As it is, he will be faced with the task of building another to effect his return—and unless he is a clever man indeed, his chances are of course exceedingly slim. Zercheq was only half-finished when the S Council apprehended him.”

“We are the—innocent victims of a trap, then.”

“It need not be a trap, precisely, my dear. There is a slim chance that we may return—but that must of course remain in his hands. Quite

probably, he may fail. Therefore, we must go about the process of adapting ourselves, and in any measure possible, alter and adapt this civilization to our own methods and standards.”

“Please, Douglas—”

“Yes?”

SHE looked away from him for a moment, then back, but with her eyes lowered.

“I suppose changing them,” she said softly, “would be a—a challenge to you, Douglas.” Then her eyes came up, looked full into his. “Please, let us use his device. Let us go back. I—I am afraid, Douglas,” she said.

“Afraid?” His tone was that of a man speaking half in doubt, half in impatience. “I still fail to understand you, Lisa. A moment ago you said—”

“Then forgive me,” she interjected with a nervous suddenness. “It is—let us say it is the shock.”

“If so it shall wear off. But you may be assured, Lisa, there is nothing to fear. These people are at least a century behind us, generally speaking. Sociologically, they are where we were before the formation of the Prelatinate—purely a case of arrested development dating from antiquity. Technologically they are very little behind us—perhaps only decades. I am not



as yet familiar with the manifold details of which the causes are comprised, but the effects in themselves are starkly obvious. There are wars, for one thing. They are the end effect of all the other contributory effects. I am in a position to inaugurate the proper political maneuvers to eliminate this end effect—and I shall. The problem of changing these people should be quite simple, and because of their terrible desperation, it should take astonishingly little time. They are slow-moving when it comes to governmental function for the direct benefit of the individual, but in their present state—as I say, almost unbelievably confused and hazardous—I am quite sure that they can be relied on to favor any possible solution to the curtailment of crisis after crisis.”

“You mean — you mean the games, don’t you, Douglas? . . .”

“Why of course! What else would I mean?”

“They have space travel, I suppose—”

“No—no, oddly, they’re highly skeptical of it—it’s still relegated to colorful pamphlets for amusement purposes and to a few rather well done pieces of fiction with all too limited circulation. But of course, when the time comes, the Sahara will serve well enough—that is where we started. Ordinarily, it

would take years with people such as these to convince them to adopt our game system. I shall work through their weak spots—their fear, their desperation, their willingness to follow beliefs unfounded in fact. Perhaps even within months . . . Lisa, you’re not listening!”

“Yes. Yes I am, Douglas.”

“I see. You think that because they’re rank amateurs in the philosophy of political mechanics, I will meet insurmountable stumbling blocks. It is true they are quite backward in economic theory, and of course that has its manifestation throughout government as well as the governed. But fortunately, their motives are transparent to anyone except themselves—that will help at least in gaining a toehold. Before I begin, I want a few hours careful study of the notes the boys are compiling. They’ve been industrious, I hope and not too taken with all this.”

She did not answer him.

“You are to be highly credited, my dear,” he said. He knew her mood would pass. It had, before . . . “They are fine sons. I shall see to it, as long as we must remain in this time-phase, that the only arms they shall ever carry will be in the war games which I feel confident I can inaugurate. They’re in the den? After you,



my dear . . . ”

He did not notice the sudden tightening of the little lines at the edges of her mouth.

FOR several days, it was little more than a game of watchful waiting. There had been committee meetings, sub-committee meetings, and each had been more tense in the complexion of its discussions than the one preceding it. These men, he found, were little, desperate men, and had but only recently come to realize it.

The notes Ronal and Kurt had compiled for him were extensive and accurate. Fundamentally, he understood the background of cause and effect underlying the tensions, and had realized at once that these men had become mired so deeply in the swale of political intrigue that they had at last come to the point where they would gladly grab at the nearest straw to extricate themselves. But they had run out of straws. They had begun running out in the early 1950's; each had broken pitifully since the Korea fiasco, and now they had been used up. He listened, for his opportunity could come at any moment—and it must be precisely the right moment.

“Gentlemen,” one of them began in the soft drawl of the south, “I am in favor of the President’s pro-

posal for two main reasons and two alone: firstly, it is an indirect solution to the thorny problem of Civil Rights. Secondly, we simply must have the arms. No one could have foretold that Soviet Russia would have succeeded as she did in ultimately outproducing us. Therefore we are caught by surprise, and simply must have the funds, gentlemen. I wish to go definitely on record as favoring the 50 per cent tax on individual income . . . ”

“Impossible! I think the Congressman forgets the inherent strength in the will of the people! I tell you they’ve had all they will take. Especially in your own state, Congressman—they will become slaves in a far more severe sense of the word than they ever were before the Civil W—pardon me, the War Between the States.”

“As I pointed out, Congressman, the President’s proposal will solve the thorny Civil Rights problem. And at any rate, the people of which you so respectfully speak, Congressman, seem to have learned that politics is after all a matter for the professional politicians. I think we both realize that whether or not they feel, as you say, that they have had all they can take, they will do little about it. When, in recent years, have they, may I ask? I suggest, therefore . . . ”

Several of the conferees looked in Blair's direction, as though, expecting him to do something. But the time was not yet. And when it came, he must be careful—even in their desperation, they would not accept it whole-hog.

"—and I b'lieve it is obvious that by working gradually, as we have in the past, we should not have any of the trouble the Congressman from New York suggests. Each year, we have simply added a little more, and promised it would be the last time. Until now, even at 30 per cent we are in a position to continue almost indefinitely. One thing the people do fear, gentlemen, is war. We have been skillful, and let us not mince words about it. They have been thoroughly frightened!"

Of course that was it. Gradually, with accompanying promises . . . The fear had been made a direct thing, and the tangled, subtle causes beneath had become psychologically, if not actually, inaccessible.

All of the causes, of course, he might never learn. But the general effects were obvious, so it was on them and with them alone that he must build his case.

IT was now a matter of discerning how many of these men were genuinely concerned with

bettering the situation, how many were tenaciously satisfied with the status quo, and how many were intent on using the situation to better their own interests. All were desperate men. Only their goals were different.

In time of course he would be able to do away with most of them. They would in all probability fail to fit in a world organized about the psychological concept on which the games were built. The people themselves, however, if what the southern Congressman had said were true, would fit perfectly.

And inwardly, he smiled. It was almost a simple thing, because it was obvious that what the man had said was at least true to a degree. Their economic set-up was proof of it. Millions and millions of pieces of green paper, in which they had implicit faith despite the facts which they knew to be true—that far less than half of their paper currency was validly backed by the standard metal on which it was based. There was not that much ore in the planet's entire crust!

But they *believed* that the system worked, and that was all that was necessary.

Just as the people of his own time-phase believed that a child could actually be conditioned for

life against violence, after sustaining the temporary psychological shock caused by a week's subjugation to the bloody horror of wanton slaughter. It was understood that such severe psychological shock during the early years of mental development was sufficient to condition each new generation for life against any future acts of violence as adults, and it was believed because it seemed to work. And because it seemed to work, it was believed *in*. Each surviving youth grew into adulthood as convinced as his neighbor that the conditioning of the games was lifelong, that the psychological scar they left was permanent, and would therefore render impossible any form of violent conflict.

The belief, scientifically questionable as it might be, was never challenged, because there was always the fact to face that there was, after all, no war.

There was none primarily because the games simply solved the main cause of it. Carefully controlled mortality rates on the battlefields kept the population where it belonged, prevented the ultimate over-crowding which was directly and indirectly responsible at 90 per cent of the causes of any armed conflict. The few who were sufficiently timorous to probe the philosophy upon which the system

was based were at once amazed at its simplicity: it consisted simply of a logical premise that the killing of a required number of immature children was self-evidently worth the saving of millions of valuable adults. It was a matter of necessary sacrifice.

Yes, the people of this time-phase would fit into the plan well. Not because they were intelligent, but because they had a natural tendency as followers, and because their limited imaginations held them in a mentally astigmatic state, too concerned with the status quo to ask questions concerning the future until it was too late.

Blair smiled, this time openly. Tayne could have the directorship back there! Here there was no Tayne. Here was a world for the asking, upon which he would at last be the object of primary, not tertiary, worship by a planet! He could take the shapeless clay—could cultivate it, could forge it in time into a great, brilliant civilization—and it would be his, all his. What greater monument to the genius of a man . . .

**I**T was a week later when the time came. The Congressman from the south had been on a brief inspection of a hydrogen bomb site following a test detonation. The pink flush had subsequently van-

ished from his jowls and in its place was the color of ash. His brain had been mightily disturbed; he had been forced to the painful recourse of thought, and that had disturbed it even further.

Two other Congressmen were getting away with intelligent debate, because the Congressman from the south was at last quite silent.

" . . . And I contend that our armed forces have not at all times been informing us truthfully, especially regarding the need for vast land armies, when it is obvious that they have become obsolete. It is my opinion that their maintenance is used simply as a tool, gentlemen—a tool to gouge extra taxes from the public, thereby enforcing their increased dependence for survival on the government itself."

"You mean, Congressman, to say that the Army lies?"

"Like a rug, Congressman!"

There was a murmur throughout the group, short, whispered exchanges.

"You can substantiate this claim?"

"Do I really have to, Congressman?"

A gavel rapped quickly. Blair had slipped for the moment into the comfort of relaxation; by the Prelatinate, it was *amusing!*

Then the debate continued, and

he was at last convinced that these men were genuinely afraid that the war from which no amount of influence or money could buy their safety was imminent. The third war in their history which would genuinely be fought to win. The others had been their American Revolution, and their Civil War.

Then, "Congressman Blair. You've had little to say for the last few days. Perhaps this subcommittee could profit by an opinion from you . . ."

The chance had come.

He rose. "I have a plan," he said, "that may seem fantastic to you. I have waited until most of the routine arguments were heard, so that this thing would not be any more confused and bogged down in senseless debate than necessary. I am prepared to answer all questions directed to me regarding it, but I am finished at the first sign of the usual harangue."

HE watched their faces. They were suddenly intense; and there was a new alertness in them. It was true, then—they did respect him; he had a good following.

"It is quite evident that our enemy has taken the advantage by surprise. The nuclear weapons on both sides have kept us deadlocked for about seven nervous, uncomfortable, difficult years. And

the deadlock is now on the verge of finally being broken, and to his advantage. He is now capable of outproducing us—his dealings with unscrupulous American businessmen have finally borne fruit, and he has sprung his surprise. His nuclear weapons outnumber ours five to one and he is in the driver's seat whether we care to deny it or not. And we are stuck with twenty million men under arms in the field—rifles and hand-grenades, lumbering tanks and a few other ridiculous toys. An organization so tremendous that it trips itself and falls flat on its face at every attempted move.

"But you gentlemen are painfully aware of all this, as are the high-ranking, tradition-bound military leaders who are still denying it. What you may not be aware of is that we may equalize our position if we are quick to act—we may counter-surprise, counter-shock, if we do not delay.

"I therefore ask your support, gentlemen, when I introduce my bill to immediately lower the present minimum draft age from seventeen to thirteen years."

The gavel clattered for order. "Many had risen to their feet.

"Your questions, one at a time, gentlemen."

"Very well. The chair recognizes the Congressman from New Jer-

sey."

"May I submit, Congressman Blair, that your plan is crazy? You yourself admitted that manpower alone is woefully insufficient to cope with this situation."

"It is, as such. In the form of surprise—and believe me, it would surprise the enemy ten times the degree to which it has obviously shocked this group here—it would prove of great value, in that it would reflect a murderously frightening desperation. It would, of course, have to be simultaneously accompanied by an immediate step-up in production of nuclear weapons. All other types would immediately be dropped. Factory shifts would in all instances immediately become full-day, full-week."

"The Congressman from California."

"And you mean to imply that our enemy would actually stand in fear of a thirteen-year-old?"

"Human mass has nothing to do with age, Congressman."

"The Congressman from Ohio."

"What you suggest, Congressman, is inhuman, unbearably horrible—you suggest that we support you in a bill to draft *children!*"

"To make my point more clear, perhaps I should ask some questions of my own. First, am I to

understand that this group was at any time in *opposition* to Universal Military Training? And—second, is the youth of seventeen a grown man?

“Or shall I ask the question this way—where would you rather place these youngsters—in a position to possibly solve our dilemma, or in cities that cannot possibly be adequately defended, and have them marked for certain death along with the rest of us in them?

“You say my proposal is unbearably inhuman. You are right. War is. It makes little difference how you draft its plans.

“Are there any further questions?”

There were none.

“Very well. I will call for a confidence vote, with the chair’s permission.”

“Permission granted.”

The Congressman from the south was very white. And very silent.

## CHAPTER VIII

DOT’S face was tense as she watched him. Doug held the delicate phone device to his ear with pressure that made his flesh white around it. He was oblivious to the wonder-like comforts of the beautiful home now, cursing it subconsciously as though it had been

built for the sole purpose of trapping him, imprisoning him here.

The high-pitched signal in the receiver repeated evenly and he forced himself to wait. His fingers drummed an uneven tattoo on the low table, vibrated the dismantled parts of the tele-radio set that he’d examined earlier. The open pages of the catalogue from the Science Council library trembled in his left hand.

“Electrosupply, Federal Service Division,” the voice said suddenly.

“Hail, this is Senior Quadrate Blair again.”

“Hail, sir. Is there something unsatisfactory? The equipment you ordered should have arrived at your home—”

“It has, it is satisfactory. However I find that I neglected to request a high speed bl—correction, high-kempage power pack.” He tried to steady the pages. The closely printed alphabetized lines kept running together.

“High-kempage power pack? Your reference, sir?”

“Reference?” The veins on his throat stood out, but his voice was not a sudden bellow from indignation. “You forget my position! How soon may I expect the unit?”

“As soon as possible, sir.”

He hung up. “Damn,” he said. “Damn it to hell anyway!”

“Doug, can I do anything?”

"No, honey, no. We've just got to sweat it out until that pack gets here. It'll be all right." He forced a smile, sank to a chair, put his head in his hands. She knelt beside him. "The film-strips, that you saw—they must have been—horrible."

He looked up. "Horrible isn't the word. God, what people. And at first they seemed so—What a cold-blooded, ruthless—"

"Easy, mister." She came closer to him and he felt himself relax slowly at the warmth of her touch.

"What a system . . . I guess I read over those reports a dozen times. They know there is no possible way to tell how long such an awful mental shock will stay—even in the impressionable mind of a half-grown child. Yet they accept it as full-blown conditioning process—they *believe* in it! They *believe* in everything around here—they worship the government, the Prelate General, the Director—even me! And because there's no war and hasn't been since the first Prelātinate, they keep right on believing that from the day you fight in the games—if you survive—til the day you die, you're thoroughly conditioned against physical violence—" He let the sentence taper off into silence.

"Just rest awhile, darling," she murmured.

He smiled. "Thanks, Dot. But I've got to get that mess downstairs cleaned up. I'll be all right."

The equipment—the neat sorted rows of resistors, condensers, vacuum tubes and the rest of it glittered on the long, wide expanse of the workbench he'd installed. At one end was a half-completed framework, and at the other—was the blackened ruin of what had been a transformer.

The burnt-out unit had cooled, but the stench of overheated oil and melted insulation still hung in the air trapped in the blue haze of smoke.

"Can any of the rest be assembled in the meantime, Doug? I'll help . . ."

HE busied himself with the blackened junk. "It could, but it's not worth the chance. It's got to be so damn perfect. I've got to know exactly what I'm going to be able to get out of the pack. Got to have at least 1,000 Volts—or should I say Kemps—anyway. Damn the DC . . ."

He hadn't found out about the utility power in the house until he'd blown up the transformer. It was a little thing, direct current rather than alternating current, but it meant time, and there wasn't much time. He knew there'd be no chance of his getting through the



games undetected, even if he found a way somehow to stomach such a horror.

There was a gentle chiming sound.

"The front door, Doug!"

"Guess I really threw a scare into 'em! You go up first, I'll douse the lights."

There were two of them, and their uniforms were white. Their helicopter idled on the front lawn. They saluted.

"Quadrante Blair, if you'll accompany us please."

They stood there; their faces impassive, their tones matter-of-fact as though they had asked him to pass the salt.

"Accompany you? I understood that you were going to deliver—"

"S-Council, Department of Security, sir. You appreciate our position. We have our orders. The Prelatine-Attorney suggests an interview immediately, sir. If you will accompany us, please."

"You may tell the—the Prelatine-Attorney that I'm quite busy, but that I shall be glad to make an appointment for him later tomorrow."

They stood there. There was a questioning look on Dot's face, and he had no answer for it. Somehow, they'd gotten onto something. Jane. No. Tayne again—

"We are sorry, sir."

"I'm afraid I fail to understand. You make it sound actually as though I'm to have no choice in the matter. Who issued your orders?"

"Office of the Director, sir. And actually, sir, you have no choice. If you will please accompany us."

They stood, immobile, waiting. There were only two of them. But he knew that in minutes there could be two hundred.

He went with them.

HE judged the pneumatic elevator tube had descended at least 20 levels below the surface before it came to a softly-whispering halt on a resilient cushion of compressed air. They left the tube, and the same miracle of lighting that kept the city in eternal daylight was gently suffused through the entire length of the wide, silent corridors.

They did not walk far. Doug forced his mind into what order he could. If this were some adventure fantasy from the pages of fiction there would somehow be an escape, some thing he could suddenly do and the tables would be turned. But it was not. It was fantastic, but it was as real as the day the first atomic bomb was dropped.

The sliding panel admitted them to a round, low-ceilinged room sim-

ilar in most respects to his own office, even to the intertelecon screen inset in the curving wall to the left of the large metal desk. The man behind the desk was thin-faced and slight, but there was an intelligence behind the high forehead that seemed to put a snap in his wide-spaced eyes as well as in his voice. But it was the eyes that made Doug's nerves feel that they must break like an overdrawn violin string at any moment; the voice was smooth, controlled.

The orderlies saluted and were dismissed. The panel slid closed.

"Sorry to have to call you down here like this, Doug. But damn it, it's my job, and besides that you've done something this time for which there'd be hell to pay if the PG ever found out and you know it as well as I do."

He gestured Doug to a chair. The Prelatine-Attorney's tone was relaxed, but Doug wondered how it might have sounded to a man of lesser rank than himself.

One thing was certain; it was time to go back into the act. "I suppose this all is leading up to threats of the S-Council—"

"Doug, when the DO buzzed me and said they'd been notified by Electrosupply that you'd refused to give a reference for a piece of equipment you ordered, there was nothing else for me to do but to

get you down here on the spot. You can imagine where I'd be if I didn't."

"It was Tayne I suppose."

There was a quick flick of the attorney's eyes, but his face didn't change. "Personalities don't matter, Doug."

Doug waited for it. Behind the nonchalance, the employer-to-faithful-but-errant-employee tone, there was something of hard spring steel, coiled, waiting to be sprung.

"I'm not sure I like your tone," Doug bluffed. "I have some degree of position you know—"

"Yes, I know—you seldom let anybody forget it. I understand you've even reminded the Director on occasion . . ."

Doug shrugged. "Suppose we get down to it. Just what is there this time that has the DO so upset?"

THE Attorney stiffened visibly.

"What is there? You mean you don't realize that you've come about as close as anyone can come to committing a capital heresy? Did you actually suppose you could order a thing like that without a triple-endorsed Science Council reference? You know as well as I do how strict the law is about possession of restricted equipment of any kind by anyone except members of the Science Council it-

self. Even the Director has to go through channels! Where d'you think we'd be, anyway, if just anybody and everybody could read any books, tinker with any kind of paraphernalia they wanted to? Damn it, man, if every Tom, Dick and Harry went fooling around with the knowledge that wasn't food for them the whole damn planet would be in the S-chambers!"

"What do you mean, restricted—?"

"And we can't have any exceptions! Except, that is, for the special training such as picked men as yourself received at the Quadrature Academy. But when it comes to personal possession of restricted stuff, without the required reference, you might just as well be caught with a copy of Freud in your library!"

The pack. That had to be what he meant—he'd been phoning for the pack, and they'd asked for a reference . . . Somehow, he had to—the catalogue! *The closely printed lines that got tangled up because he couldn't hold it steady!*

"You're accusing me of ordering restricted—"

"Now look, Doug. You'd better tell me—I don't want it on the record that I had to use Right of Office to get an answer. You ordered a high-kempage power-pack. Now what for?"

"High-kempage power pack? You can't be serious!"

"I've warned you, Doug."

"Warn and be damned! You sit there and repeatedly accuse me of ordering restricted equipment—without reference, and you haven't even got your facts straight! Did Electrosupply tell you that?"

A peculiar look was on the Attorney's face.

"DO said so."

"Well you could've saved us a good hour's time if you'd have called me to see what I had to say first before dragging me over here as if I were a common criminal! I think an apology will be in order!" *If only Barnum had been right!* "What I ordered, just in the event you're as interested as you say you are, was a high-speed blower-rack!"

"A—what?"

*Reel him in!*

"A high-speed blower-rack. So happens I'm having trouble with the electronic units of my vento-conditioner at home, and I'm doing the work myself more or less as a project in avocational therapy—"

"Now it is you who can't be serious. How great a fool do you think—"

"Damn it, whose word are you going to take in this?" Doug stood up. "Some Electrosupply technician's, who can't hear any bet-

ter than you can reason, or mine?"

There was a second's silence.

"All right, Doug. You're a fool, you know. You are, and so am I . . . It was a high-speed blower-rack. I'll make sure it's set straight."

"Well, thank you."

"Just be careful, Doug."

"That's good advice—don't wear it out!"

He turned quickly, made his exit before the panel had widened half-way.

## CHAPTER IX

THE ugly, black building stood out like a shapeless smudge of soot against the milk-white sky, but it was by sheer accident that Terry and Mike discovered it, built as it was at the water's edge where the high blue grass had been neither trampled nor trimmed, and at a distance further from the training areas than they had ever ventured.

"We'd better go back, Terry. We'll get in trouble." Mike's young body glistened with perspiration as he stood on the knoll with his brother, eyes still fastened to the low black structure as he spoke. His equipment belt was heavy and he tugged again at it to change the distribution of its weight. The broadsword swung loosely at his

left side, not quite counterbalancing the mace which hung by its thong to his right.

"They said there were a couple of hours before the next class, didn't they? The guy in the sharp uniform said we could amuse ourselves any way we wanted."

"Sure, but this isn't the way the others are doing it. They all went out and started practicing with the swords again. We oughtta."

"You rather do that than go exploring?"

Mike touched the half-healed flesh-wound on his right shoulder. He remembered how the short, dark-haired kid had laughed when it had started to bleed, and then how mad he got when he found he couldn't use the sword well enough to cut him back.

"I'd like to get that guy."

"Don't be a dope. It's only a dream—you didn't really get hurt. Come on let's see what that place is. Nobody's around . . ."

"Maybe it is only a dream, but he made me mad. Boy I'll cut his ears off if I—"

"Aw, come on."

They had barely started down the opposite side of the knoll when Jon Tayne's voice hailed them.

"Hey, you two! Where d'you think you're going, anyway?" They waited for him. There was a cross look on his face which Mike im-

mediately resented.

"Over there." He pointed toward the black building. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing to me, but it'll be double duty to you if you don't get back to the recreation area right away."

"There's a lot of time yet. He said we could amuse ourselves, didn't he?"

"That doesn't mean walking around wherever you please. It means just what it says—giving your weapons a work-out. I was called away from a good match just to come and find you two. Come on."

They turned, fell in at either side of him.

"We didn't mean anything wrong," Terry said.

"They'll let it go this time because you're new, and because you are who you are. But you guys had better be more careful. That's restricted back there."

"What's that? Restricted?"

"You should know that!"

"What is it?"

"Your father never told you anything, did he?"

"Sure—course he did. Lots of things. But there's no way he'd know what that place is."

**J**ON stopped in mid-stride. "No way he'd know? You crazy?"

"Who's crazy?" Terry clenched his fists, stuck his chin out.

"Look here—you want a fight or something?" Jon's hand went to the hilt of his sword. Terry unhooked his mace. Mike had his sword half free of its wide scabbard.

Jon let his arms drop to his sides.

"Come on, wise guy, who's crazy?" Terry glared at him.

"You know what'll happen to you if you do anything to a section leader?"

"We didn't ask to be here," Mike said. "And we didn't ask to be pushed around, either, or told where we could go and couldn't go. Or be called crazy, either. The whole thing is dumb."

"After the games, if you're still alive, I'll report you for that," Jon said.

"Still alive? Who you kidding? You talk like there was going to be a war. Grown-ups do that, kids don't."

"What do you think you're being trained to use your weapons for?"

"That's easy," Terry said. "So we'll know how to use 'em when we're grown ups. It's called UMT or something."

"You guys are cr—ah, don't be funny. The games start in three days, then you'll know if you're in a war or not. And frankly, I hope

you both end up back there." He turned, started walking.

Terry and Mike let their hands fall from their weapons, followed after him.

"Nobody's being funny," Mike said. "Suppose we do end up back in that place? So what?"

"Listen the hero," Jon said. "You planning on taking on the whole First Quadrant single-handed or something? They sure don't bring you back to life back there, if that's what you think. They just make you a little deader."

"Deader?"

"Well I'd rather be buried if I get killed than burned into a little pile of ashes and sent home in a jar. And that's what they do. There's not enough land on Venus to bury everybody every year, and they sure aren't going to go to the trouble of hauling a bunch of corpses out into the ocean just to dump 'em. Not when they can burn 'em up, anyway, right here."

"Burn 'em up?" Mike said, feeling funny in his stomach. "Alive?"

"Not often, I guess. Only when there's a mistake and they don't notice it in time. Or if there haven't been enough guys killed to make the year's quota. Then they take unconscious ones. That's what my father told me once, anyway."

"Suppose—suppose you're just hurt bad? Do they—"

"Not if they've made the quota. If you end up hurt they take you to the other land mass—there's a big hospital there. I've never seen it, but my father says it's the biggest single building ever made."

"How long are you kept there?"

"Until you're recovered, of course. The longest case on their records was my cousin's. He got a broken neck when he was hit in the face by a mace, and lost both eyes. They repaired the cut nerves, gave him two new eyes, and fixed his neck in about a month. They can do anything, so you don't have to worry. I got a broken back myself last year—I was out walking in two weeks."

THE recreation area was almost in view. Already they were able to hear the clash of metal on metal, as though a great tangled mass of scythes was being shaken by some huge, clumsy hand which could not break them apart.

"Jon . . ."

The section leader was quickening his pace. "Yes?"

"How in heck do they know about the quota? How do they know if they should pick you up if you're hurt, or just leave you there?"

"The tab ships take care of it."

There's a whole fleet of 'em, and they cover each area where there's fighting. They tabulate everything that happens with things called telescaners, and they keep in constant communication with the Quadrate's ship. Any time during the fighting, they know if they're ahead of the quota rate or behind it in their own area. And all the time, the Quadrates are comparing the figures they get from the tab ships with each other so they can keep a running record of the quota rate for all four quadrants. As long as the rate's right, or high, the medical ships keep landing and picking up the wounded, and flying 'em back. When the tabulations show the rate's lagging, the medical ships take it easy until they get the word to get to work again."

"They wouldn't have so much work to do if we could use guns instead of these things," Terry said. "I think guns would be more fun, don't you?"

"That's what your father thinks, isn't it?"

"Gosh, no, he doesn't—"

"My father says that killing at a distance isn't much good, because you never get into close contact. And if you can't see what happens when you actually kill somebody, you can't get conditioned very well. You'd get bored just sitting

around with a gun. And even in the short time of a week—"

"Is that how long it lasts?"

"Usually about that. But even then with guns, you'd get used to it. With swords it's different. You don't get used to that in a week. You still feel pretty shaky when it's all over, believe me . . ."

"Were you scared, Jon?"

"You shouldn't be scared," he said. "All you have to remember is what they keep telling you—the others will kill you if you don't kill them. Always remember that. Then it gets to be sort of a—well, like a game, to see who's strongest, who can use a sword the best . . ."

"Yeah," Mike said. "Wait'll I get that guy!" His fingers brushed lightly against the half-healed wound again.

Jon laughed. "Sore at somebody already?"

"I'll cut his ears off!"

"You're getting the idea all right! Just be sure you don't go breaking any more rules—you can't kill anybody until the games begin, you know."

"I'll show him!" Mike said. "How long do we have yet to practice? Now, I mean?"

"Half an hour, maybe. I'll see you later. I'll forget about reporting you this time—but don't go for any more walks!" He left them, and they walked into the



recreation area with the others.

Mike found the boy who had laughed. And he found that it was as Jon had said. There wasn't any reason to feel afraid. The sword wasn't as heavy in his hands as it had been at first, and it was more thrilling to use than just fists . . .

The other boy was grinning, and it was easy to get mad enough to want to cut his head off. Both hands on the long haft of his weapon, Mike swung harder, more surely than the first times he handled the sword. He could parry, now—and cut. Like *that!*

The boy staggered back. The side of his head was bleeding profusely, and the blood spurted through his fingers as he pressed them to the gaping place where his ear had been.

"Rules! Rules!"

Mike lowered his sword. That was right, the rules. He couldn't kill now . . .

So he tried to laugh. At first he had to force the sound from his throat, but suddenly he found it coming easily, clear, and loud.

The boy left the field toward the medical tents.

And Mike found another with whom to practice. It was what Jon had said, a great game—a great, crashing adventure!

He swung the sword and won-

dered if the dream would ever have to end.

## CHAPTER X

DOUG worked silently. His eyes stung, and he wasted a moment to rub them again, because he must see, must see so precisely, so exactly. The work table was almost bare of the equipment he had ordered. The new Contraption had devoured it into its fantastic vitals as fast as his taut hands and flagging memory were able to feed. Yet it was useless work—the gleaming thing he had built would never so much as fry an egg.

Yet he worked as though the power-pack were resting on the table among the scraps of wire, bits and pieces that were left, as though somehow it would be there when he needed it, and then they could go, could escape, and then forget . . . The two shiny terminals glared at him dully like two tiny eyes, each telling him that he was such a fool to hope that they could ever be anything else than bare. They glared at him, told him that he was finished now, finished, but with the end impossibly far away.

He let the tools drop amid the bits and pieces. The Contraption was a cold, dead thing, a mockery without its great surging electric heart. A mockery, a precisely as-

sembled heap of shiny junk.

He was near exhaustion as he looked at the two empty terminals. The anger in him had burned out and became a cold leaden thing. He no longer cared about the ridiculous beliefs, the regulations, the laws that prohibited him from obtaining the thing he needed to free himself—no longer cursed himself, for it was not he who was to blame.

He went upstairs to where Dot slept, and wondered if this was how it felt to be a thousand years old. Finally tired, finally fed-up, finally weary of being a fool.

He watched her as she slept, watched the gentle rise and fall of her breasts, let his eyes wander over the soft symmetry of her body, and asked himself why men were so dutiful in creating their clanking idiocies about life and about death when all that such diligence accomplished was eternal blasphemy of the pure and simple. The beautiful they defiled, then disguised the ruin they left with a cloak labeled Duty, and went forth armed with the rotten wood of what they called Law to build a dingy world more to their liking than the garden that had been given them for nothing . . .

It was not fair, no it was not fair, but he was tired at last. Too tired to look now for another time-

track, to throw the Contraption wildly out of focus and careen through a thousand tracks, a million, and look for a place where a man and a woman could be simply that and nothing either more nor less. For in all infinity there was no such place, and the running would be worth less than the wasted breath it took.

With Dot, one last time, then.

She stirred. Her eyes opened, and she smiled.

"Doug? Did you finish it, Doug?"

"Yes. Yes, I finished it, as far as it ever will be finished."

She dropped her eyes. "We can keep trying." They met his. "We will keep trying, Doug. We've got to—for Terry and Mike . . ."

He said nothing. He sat heavily on the bed, his features grim.

He took off his shirt and dropped, exhausted, beside her.

HE awoke with the idea.

"Dot! Dot I think I've found it!" He was instantly on his feet, trying to jam the sleep back from the center of his brain, trying to make sure it was no leftover figment from a nightmare, a wild dream. He heard her footsteps coming almost at a run.

"What is it? You sound as if you've found a pre-Truman dollar under the bed—"

"I don't know—it may be as half-baked as the kind that came later—worth even less, perhaps, but it's worth a try. They say desperate situations call for desperate action . . ."

"Take it easy, now. You aren't the blood and thunder type, exactly!" There was a note of cautious anticipation in her voice, but there was hope in it, and it was enough.

"Tomorrow—or more exactly, some sixteen hours from now, we are scheduled to take off for Venus headquarters to begin the games . . ."

"Yes, I know," she said quietly.

"Well that's it, don't you see? I'll go of course—I'll go but not all the way!"

"Doug I won't let you—any more than you'd let me try to seduce the Prelate General into giving us the thing!"

"And I'll bet you could, too!" He laughed, and it was a real laugh for the first time in what seemed all his life. "But I'm afraid the Prelate General is going to be denied that dainty bit of intrigue, my darling. Don't you see? Space ships—they've got to have a method of communication! High-frequency radio—high-voltage stuff! Ten to one I'd find a power-pack aboard!"

"No, Doug, no . . ."

"It's a chance, Dot, and it's a good one. I'll be the ranking officer aboard of course—I shouldn't have too much trouble in pirating the thing—I'll make them rip the pack out for me, then I'll order them to bring me back. Then it'll just be a race against time."

He stood there, staring at the delicate tracery of a lattice-work wall, not seeing it. But he heard the fear in Dot's voice.

"A space ship, Doug . . . Why you'd—you'd die."

He laughed. "I'm sure the other Quadrates don't plan on dying, not for awhile yet, anyway. And I know it'll work, if I'm careful. And I've been careful so far." He looked at her, and the fear had not left her eyes. "You mustn't be afraid, Dot," he said then. "There's less to fear this way, because this way there's at least a chance. Don't you see the beauty of it—right up to the last moment, everything will appear to be as it should—and then before there's even any suspicion I'll take over—probably be almost back to Earth before they even know anything's gone hay-wire."

"Won't they be able to radio back from the other ships, I mean, when they realize things aren't as they should be—that the ship you are in isn't tagging along in the formation? They'll just be wait-

ing' for you when you land, Doug."

"They'll want to be waiting, sure—but they won't know where, not until I'm down, and safely out, headed here."

Dot didn't say anything then. It was such a story-book plan, such a crazy thing that it would never work; she knew it would never work.

"Doug, Doug . . ."

He held her close to him.

"Dot," he said, "we have two choices I think. We can be mature, we can be logical, we can make a tragedy out of a desperate situation and die martyrs to conservative thinking. Or we can keep grabbing at straws until we are sunk or end up ingloriously alive. Which way?"

She looked up at him, tears in her eyes. "I guess a knock-down drag-out thriller, mister . . . But Doug—I'm scared."

HE stood still, apart from the other three as they talked in low, casual tones, waiting for the space-tower signal to board their ships. An early morning breeze tugged gently at his blue cloak, and he had to shield his eyes with his gauntlets as he looked at the four slender columns of glittering metal that tapered to needle points high above him. A quarter their diameter and height they might

have been simple V-2 rockets on some strange desert proving-ground. At the same time they were the fantastic silver darts that he remembered from the pages of colored Sunday supplements which had foretold the coming of flight through Space. Yet the feeling of everyday security that they tore away was replaced with a vigorous thing inside him that was of firmer stuff than awe, more challenging than fear, more exciting than adventure. And suddenly, sailing ships were the toys of children, and oceans were spilled tea in a saucer.

They were a strange people, Doug thought. A horrible people, perhaps, a people whom he wanted desperately to escape. Yet a people who had learned that the sky and the Earth were not enough, nor were ever meant to be.

A green light flashed. The three Quadrates ended their conversation, boarded waiting surface vehicles and started toward their ships.

A car with a pennant bearing the insignia of a Senior Quadrate flying from atop its sleek passenger enclosure drove up beside Doug.

"Your transportation, sir."

He returned the salute. "Thank you, no. I shall walk," he said.

It was a short walk—less than two hundred yards, but he did not

want it all to happen too quickly.

His steps were measured in slow, deliberate cadence as he crossed the smooth plaza toward the great craft on which his insignia was emblazoned.

At length he was swallowed up inside it, and at a flashing blue signal, the four great ships thundered for the stars, and left Earth a little thing behind them.

*(Concluded Next Month)*

# INTRODUCING The Author

★ Fox B. Holden ★

*(Continued from Page 2)*

engineering. I did, too—for about six months. But someplace there was a slip between the slide-stick and the psyche—by now I had read so much science-fiction that I wanted to write some myself. Switched to liberal arts, learned the alphabet, and *viola, siehst-du?*

H: (already losing interest) And that's where you learned to write things.

H: (more seriously for a moment) I might never have really begun, or kept trying, if it hadn't been for a fine professional in Middlebury who, for some reason, liked me. What I know, and where I've gotten so far, I owe largely to him. His name is Murray Hoyt.

H: (still interviewing) Keep going. 196 words left.

H: (getting warmed up now that it's almost over) Army. Air

Corps first as a cadet, but things didn't quite work out. Infantry. Then ASTP, and Signal Corps. Wound up at Fort Knox as a tanked shave-tail (commanded a tank, you know) with a minor adventure here and there, and finally made it home—quite unheroically, not from overseas—and after getting the B.A. I'd started out for six years before, got my first newspaper job. General reporter, feature-writer, part-time desk-man, and you-name-it. Left there after a couple of years, and am now in West Haven, Conn., an assistant telegraph editor on the New Haven Register. And—oh yes. I got married. Two years ago, to a terrific art teacher.

H: (still interviewing) And—does she—

H: (still talking) Reads science-

fiction. Paints, too, of course, but reads science-fiction. Listens to sci—

H: (tiring) And now for your future?

H: (not tiring a bit) Oh, I have a very diversified field of interests. Aeronautics, Willy Ley,

science-fiction, and money. Which, by the way, reminds me of the time I—

H: (sick of the whole thing) Learned, I'm sure, what "thirty" meant!

—Fox B. Holden

**COMING NEXT MONTH:—**

# SKY LIFT

by

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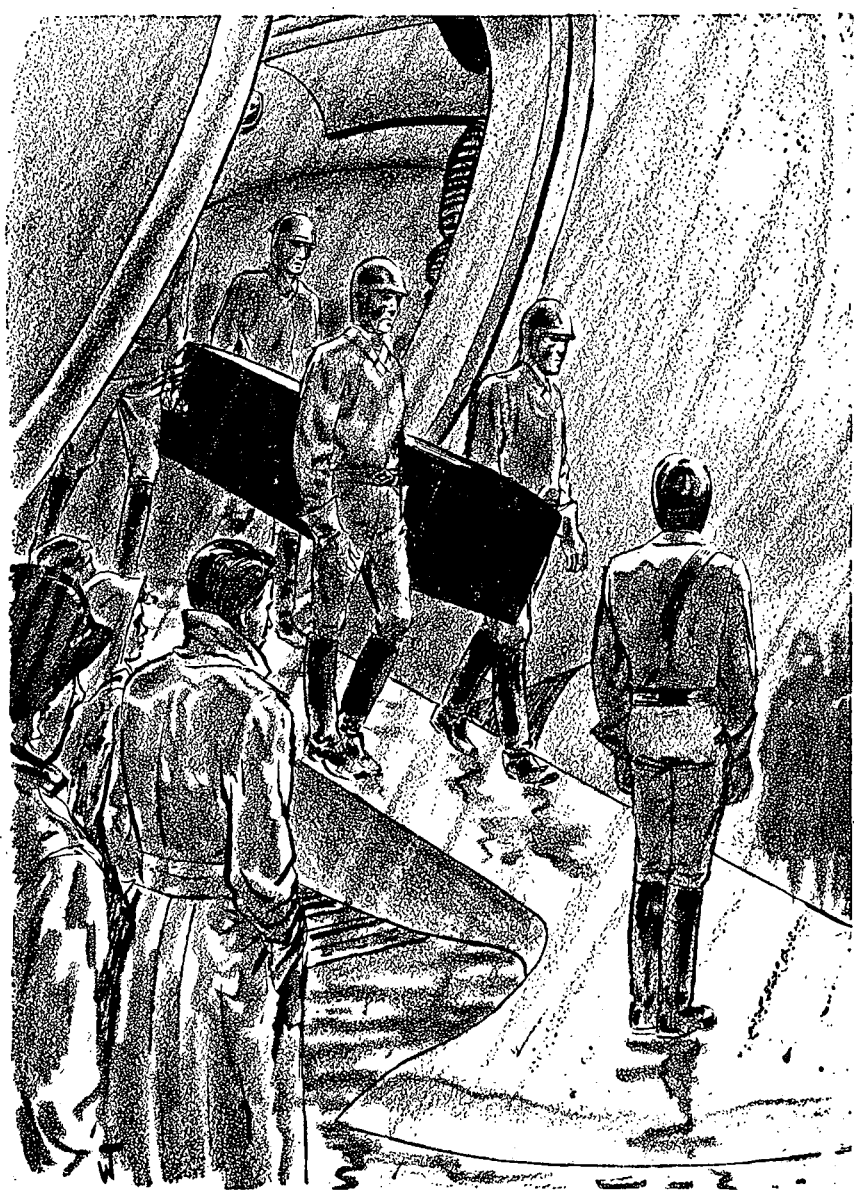
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# HEIR APPARENT

By

Alan E. Nourse

**What drives a man to the stars on a life of high adventure and grave peril? Even more important—can a girl's love keep him home?**



**W**E watched in silence as grim - faced, uniformed guards carried the small bronze casket down from the space ship. There were thousands of us standing there in the pouring rain, soaked to the skin. Yet somehow we didn't notice the rain or the discomfort. We had waited years for this moment, to honor a great man's triumphal return to Earth . . . He had waited too long. The odds he faced had finally cancelled out luck, skill, and the guts a brave man needs to face space alone . . .

They carried his casket by us, across the sopping field, boots sucking noisily in the heavy mud. Instead of smiles there were tears that even the rain couldn't hide. And many a woman sobbed openly now . . . perhaps thinking of her own

son or husband up there someplace . . .

*I couldn't find any tears. And that was strange. For of all the thousands of people watching his casket move slowly by, I should have felt the deepest remorse.*

*At least, when you kill a man you're supposed to feel that way . . .*

\* \* \*

IT had been so hot that I was soaked through when I finished at the hospital, and could think of nothing more enticing than a hot bath and a long night's sleep. An interne's life isn't his own, and the evenings I could call mine came so seldom I couldn't remember the last time I'd been free. Still, there were those evenings, and tonight seemed to be one of them, when I used to think I'd been foolish to keep from entanglements that would interfere with my professional progress, and begin to envy guys like Bart, with their black haired, blue eyed girls. I was pleased when I saw the light on under my door, and found Bart and Marny there. Marny was at the refrigerator pouring some beer, and Bart was pacing back and forth like a tiger, his eyes bright with excitement. "You should get another hospital," he exploded when I opened the door. "Thought you'd never get here."

"Can't tell women when to have babies," I growled. "Nobody's passed any laws yet." I stripped off my shirt and disappeared toward the shower, winking at Marny as I went. "And as for using my flat for immoral purposes—"

"Fat chance," she grinned, jerking a thumb at Bart. "The boy's on a jag. He won't come near me." I heard the glasses clinking as I showered, and slipped on a cool, fresh shirt. I found them both with their noses in beer, Marny on the couch, Bart staring out at the dark street. And I noticed the suppressed excitement in Bart's eyes as I sank down in a chair.

"Ok," I said. "So you've got news. Spill it."

*"I passed the test, Ben!"*

I squinted at him, puzzled. Something tried to clink down into place in my mind. Test? It seemed to me I *had* heard something about a test. "That's nice," I said. "What test?"

"What test! Dillon's engineering competition, stupid! I told you about that—"

My eyes widened, and I sat bolt upright. "You mean the competition for *crews*?"

Bart nodded excitedly. "That's right. Dillon got the government to back his contracts and research, and he'll be tripling the number of ships in space within the next five years. He needs men — the best

men he can get to man those ships! And these tests are designed to pick the best part for Dillon's crew—"He sank down on the davenport, his hands trembling. "It was the only smart thing to do," he said. "Every mug on the streets thinks that he wants to walk in and ferry a ship to Mars. That wouldn't work — it takes too much knowledge, too much engineering skill, and lots more. The men who go have got to be the best bets on every score — the best to handle the long trips, the best for repairing, reporting, exploring — everything. You saw what happened to the first crews that went to Mars. There wasn't any provision for anything but technical skill, and they were at each other's throats before they'd cleared Earth's orbit. They practically killed each other — some went loopy, some wouldn't come back home — Dillon had a real mess on his hands. So the tests were set up for screening. The competition was really stiff —"

I stared at him. "And you passed the tests —"

He was grinning from ear to ear. "I passed them —"

**I** HEARD a swift breath, and Marny was on her feet, picking up the glasses swiftly, taking them to the kitchen. Suddenly there was a cold breath in the room, and I

caught the look on Marny's face. It was one of those unguarded moments, one of those looks no woman ever wants a man to see, but I saw it, and I saw the end of things in her eyes. A look of horror and fear. For one brief instant the shield was down, and I saw the terror and revulsion on her face and knew everything that was going through that mind-of hers. And then the look disappeared, and she was walking back into the room, her face pale but composed, watching Bart with a kind of blank sadness in her eyes. "That's — that's wonderful, Bart," she said. "You didn't tell me you were taking it —"

He looked up reddening. "I hardly dared tell anyone. It was such a slender chance. I didn't see how I could possibly get through it — the psych part, particularly. I may have to go out and hang by my knees from the jets on the trips to keep myself from getting bored, but part of the test was interested in idle-time creativity, and they said I got through it better than anyone else —"

She was staring at him, her eyes wide. "That means you'll be going into Dillon's crew —"

"It means I have a chance! The final sifting hasn't been finished, there's a dozen more tests, a dozen performance checks, half a thousand

conditioning tests I'd have to take — but don't you see what it means? It means I can go to space, Marny! It's a chance in a thousand, and it's mine! Dillon's cut the ice, he's had half a dozen ships up; but the real work's just begun. This puts me in on the ground floor, Marny. There's no end to the possibilities —"

She stared at him wordlessly. "But they say Dillon's an exploiter, Bart — a madman. He's out for what he can make out of it, and nothing more. You can't trust a man like that . . ."

Bart shrugged indifferently. "Stories," he said. "Dillon's a pioneer. Those who are afraid of space spread dirty stories, sure, but there's no proof. Anyway, I won't fly *with* Dillon. He just builds the ships, and his ships are the finest that can be built —"

"But Bart, it's a fool's errand!" The girl's eyes were huge, filling with tears. "You have a good job, a good home — you just *can't* go —"

He blinked at her, unbelieving. "With a chance like this? To go to space? I couldn't stay home—"

She looked at him, and then at me, with the strangest baffled pain in her eyes. She looked, suddenly, as though the bottom had dropped out of her world. "You — you mean that, Bart?"

The bafflement spread across Bart's face as he looked down at her. "Marny, I — I don't understand this. You know what I've wanted. I've told you time and again—"

"Oh, yes, *talk!* But I never dreamed you *meant* it! Everybody talks about going to space."

"But not everyone gets the chance!" His voice was sharp in the still, hot room.

"But only a fool would go!"

"Then I'm a fool." He turned away, and sank down slowly in a chair. "I want it more than anything in the world."

THE silence was deafening. When she spoke, her voice was hardly audible. "Then I guess that's all there is to it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if you go, we're through. That's all."

Bart blinked, his face pale. I could see his knuckles whitening on the arms of the chair. "Marny, it's only a trip —"

She was shaking her head, and her lower lip trembled. Her voice was weak, and very, very tired. "No, Bart, not just a trip. A dozen trips, or a thousand. It wouldn't make any difference." She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Bart. I couldn't do it. Across the country, across the ocean, yes. But space —"

no, I couldn't."

"But you aren't being reasonable!" he exploded. "You act as though it's the end of everything, as if a trip to Mars was something to get excited about — look, Marny. We love each other — you know that, and I know it, too. We could be married — this week, right away — I wouldn't be going for at least six or eight months — why, I might not even make it at all! The tests aren't over, this was just the first screening, and I could flunk in a hundred thousand different ways —"

"But you'd pass," she burst out. "You know you would. And then you'd go, and go, and go — what kind of marriage would that be? What about a home, or children? Oh, Bart, you know what happened to the others! You'll die, you'll be killed — think of it! You don't know what you'd find out there, and I couldn't stand it —" She looked up at him, and her eyes were full of tears and bitterness. "It wouldn't be a marriage, Bart. It couldn't be."

Bart looked up at me, his eyes pleading. "Tell her, Ben — oh, tell her, somehow — I can't, I don't know how —" He broke off, and walked to the far side of the room, his whole body trembling. — "You're not being reasonable," he broke out hotly. "You've got to

see —"

"Take me home, Bart." The girl stood up trembling.

"But Marny —"

Something in her eyes cut him off, and he took her coat, helped her into it almost savagely. "It's stupid," he said angrily. "It's stupid and unreasonable —"

"Please, Bart —"

They left without another word, walking slightly apart, the anger and hurt carving deep lines on Bart's face, Marny's eyes wide, her mouth tight as she wiped her nose, her face white as death. I walked to the window, my mind spinning, and saw them get into Bart's three-wheeler. Then they were gone, down toward the city. For a long time I stood and watched.

I KNEW that she'd come, sooner or later. She'd come to me many times before, with big problems and little, and she knew that doctors have a faculty for understanding some of the messes people get into. I wasn't surprised to see her, the next day, coming up the stairs in that blue dress that caught the blackness of her hair and the startling blueness of her eyes. Her face was just as pale as the night before, but her eyes were clear. As she sat down, a trifle uneasily, as though she couldn't quite make up

her mind whether she should have come or not, she looked like one of those perfect, exquisite pink-and-white china dolls. I sat down opposite, and offered her a smoke; she accepted, and took a small puff with nervous fingers. "I don't know why I'm here," she said, finally. "Oh, Ben, I just don't know what to do —"

"Bart?"

She nodded. "I didn't react so well last night, I guess —"

"No," I said. "I guess you didn't."

"But I didn't know what to say. It wouldn't have been right to have pretended to be happy about it."

I sighed. "That's true. There's no good in pretending — not at this point."

"But this was the first I realized he was really *serious*, Ben. Oh, you know how he talks." She stared at her cigarette for a long moment. "He's wonderful, Ben—" she said softly. "You know that, I think —"

"He's the most wonderful guy alive."

She looked up at me gratefully. "I think you mean that. I've known it — ever since our first date. He brought me into a new world, a completely new, wonderful, exciting world. I kept fooling myself that I could be part of it, I guess, that

somewhere he could find a place for me there, too. He loves me, I'm sure of it—but I'm only part of his world, just one tiny little facet —"

I snuffed out my smoke, and looked over at her. "And you?" I said. "What about your world?"

Her voice was very low. "Bart's my world. All of it. Nothing else really makes much difference to me."

I felt a little chill run up my back. "Which means?"

"I want to marry him anyway. Even if he goes, I want to marry him."

I stood up and walked across the room, my mind racing. "Are you here for advice, or did you just come to tell me this?"

"Oh, Ben, I don't know! I can't think, I don't know what to do. Do you think it could work, Ben? Somehow, could we *make* it work?"

I looked at her for a moment. "I don't know. I haven't got the sort of mind Bart has, or the sort of makeup. I actually don't know what makes him go, Marny. But I know that there's a fundamental difference between us. Me, I'm not anxious to go anyplace. Give me a quiet, middle-class practice, and a home, and a wife, and a family, and I'll never want any more. Give the same to Bart and he'd die. Ever since I've known him his eyes

have been on the stars. Can you understand that, Marny? That's his life, everything that he wants. He's been aiming at the stars since he was a kid, studying, working, getting into Rocket engineering, meeting people, talking — all with one idea. To get into space, to go places nobody has ever been. That's the kind of man Bart is. He's a wanderer, a rover. Tie him down and he'd die." I looked at her closely. "You'll kill him, Marny. No matter how much you try to give in, it'll be a losing game. It'll always be a fight between you, and going out on another trip. And you'll always lose. If you don't, you'll kill him. That's all there is to it."

There were tears in her eyes. "What should I do, Ben?"

"Tie him down, and he'll shrivel up and die. Turn him loose, and nothing in the universe can stop him. Let him go, Marny. Completely. You can find another life down here, the sort of life you need. But Bart could never find another life —"

Her eyes were wide with pain and sadness. "There's no other way, Ben?"

"If you love him, Marny, that's the only thing you can do —"

**B**ART was waiting for me, several nights later, when I got

in from the hospital. He was lying on the couch when I closed the door. His shirt was open at the neck, and he didn't even move as I hung up my jacket in the closet. Then he said: "Hi, Ben. Been waiting for you."

"Beer?"

He shook his head and sat up. He looked like he'd been through the dishwasher. There were grey circles under his eyes, and he hadn't shaved for a couple of days. But, worst of all was the look in his eyes — a look of bewilderment and torture I'd never seen there before.

"You look like hell," I said.

"I feel like hell."

"Marny?"

He nodded, and lit a cigarette. After a puff or two he snubbed it out in distaste. "Let's get some dinner," he said. All the way down to the diner he sat in the car with his chin sunk in his chest. Finally he was facing me in a booth, and he couldn't avoid my eyes any longer. "Marny and I had a talk last night."

"That's nice," I said. "What did you decide?"

"Oh, it was awful. Why can't I keep my big yap shut once in a while? I tried to reason with her, Ben. And she was so damn calm and collected, and wouldn't budge an inch, so I started losing my



temper, and then she really blew up —" He looked at me miserably. "She's too good to lose, Ben. It doesn't matter what it involves."

I looked up, wide-eyed. "What?"

He couldn't meet my eyes. "I'm not going. I'm mailing my resignation to Dillon tonight."

I just gaped at him. "Say that again, slower."

"It's no go, Ben. I'm staying home."

"So you can marry that girl?"

He nodded silently.

"So that's it," I said disgustedly. "The kitty cat has really shown her claws. What are you, a puppet or something?"

"Aw, now Ben —"

"You silly fool. So it's stay home, or else no Marny, is it? You mean to tell me she had the gall to put it *just like that*? And you're swallowing it, like the world's prize sucker!"

He looked up puzzled. "I — I just decided not to go, Ben. Maybe after we're married she'll see things differently, but it just doesn't figure any other way."

I snorted. "It figures like a Hollywood production. Straight down the line. Get the brains to working, Bart! Do you really think she's going to marry you and let you go? Like so much baloney! What woman wants to be a space-widow? She's not so dumb, Bart. She's play-

ing for keeps, and she isn't even subtle about it."

"But what am I going to do? I'm in love with her, Ben."

"Do you think she loves you?"

"I — I'm sure of it."

"But she won't even try to understand your side! My god, Bart, can't you see what's happening? She's selfish, Bart. Just plain selfish. She wants you, and she wants you on her own terms. There won't be any compromise. Turn in that resignation, and you're sunk —"

Anger lit in his eyes then. "It's not selfishness," he said doggedly.

"Then what do you call it? Has she even listened to you? Has she given even one little minute's consideration to how you feel?" I set down my coffee cup in disgust. "Marny is a woman," I said slowly. "To women, a husband and a home are the end of existence. Oh, there are other things, sure, but basically, a woman wants a husband, and somewhere, deep in her mind she has a picture of the vine-covered cottage in the country and all the rest of the bilge that goes with it. Where does a space-man fit into that picture? He doesn't. So there won't be any space-man. Do you think she really loves you, Bart? If she did, would she try to keep you here?"

"But I love her, Ben —"

"And she'll tear your heart out

for it! You don't belong down here, Bart. You belong with Dillon. You have the mind, the build, the potential that Dillon needs. Think of it! Out of all the thousands who want to go to space, you have the chance. You'll get to Mars, you'll work to open the frontier, on Mars, on Venus — we're on the edge of the greatest era of exploration and discovery the earth has ever known, Bart. We have the ships to take us to our own planets now, we need only the men with courage and strength enough to leave their homes and go. And with the new work on induced warp that Dillon's laboratories have been doing, it may not be long before we can go farther than our system — on to the stars. You belong out there, Bart — you don't belong anywhere else. And against a challenge like that, *no woman is worth it. Men like you can't stay, Bart.*"

And then I saw the old light coming back into his eyes, the light I knew I would see, the light that always appeared in his eyes when he talked about the stars. I knew the key was turned now, that he could never change, that he knew he had to go. "There's no end to the possibilities," he said softly. "There's simply no end."

He set down his coffee cup, and the light was still in his eyes. But there was something else in his eyes,

too, that hadn't been there before. Call it pain, if you want, or disappointment. "I'll have to think, Ben. I'll just have to think. But thanks for making me think."

I drained my cup, and sat back with a sigh, and felt the music sing through me. I knew the answer, now. "You won't be sorry," I said.

THE rest of the story is history, of course. Probably he never fully realized the part I had played in his decision. Possibly he wouldn't have cared. He went through Dillon's screening at the top of the list, and shipped on the little exploratory ship *Dillon's Dream*, and headed out for Mars, with a little crew around him, driving into the blackness of space as though he couldn't leave too soon. The landing was good, and the work began. What he did there everybody knows, the gruelling, dangerous work of opening the frontier, of exploring and mapping. Every child today has seen the pictures he made, and sent back, working on Mars until the first wave of colonists came, and then he was on his way again, to Venus, working in the dust and horrible wind to open it up for observation and study, working with a frenzied vitality, a fierce urgent unity of purpose that turned into legend around him as his crews came back. The staggering

courage of the man, the fearlessness, the eagerness to be first, to push farther and farther into the limitless challenge of interplanetary exploration. Pictures came back, messages came back, and later the colonists came back, telling tales of the man that grew and expanded month after month. And then, amazingly, the Dillon Warp was perfected in the laboratory, and Bart Witton was the first to petition for a ship, waiting eagerly for word from the home offices that he could command the first ship to make a star-jump. The world listened, and cheered, never quite understanding why, with all the fame, he never returned to the planet from which he came, but at every chance turned his back on quiet Earth, and his face toward the stormy stars —

So the Star-jump Station went up under his direction, the most colossal task ever undertaken in space, prelude to another infinitely more colossal task, the establishment of a Warp receiver big enough to handle a ship. Bart was the man the eyes of the world were watching when he closed the last port on the new little ship, waved a rakish farewell to the engineers and friends crowded near the ship, and then, with a burst of brilliant purple, threw in the Warp, and flashed into the hyperspace men

had dreamed of but never before seen, jumping for the stars —

He didn't make it, of course. The ship was an impossible, audacious experiment, he didn't really have a chance. They brought him back, his body wrenched and broken from the shock, the little ship torn almost into ribbons. And from the wreckage they found the flaw, the vital information to make safe Warp passage possible. They brought his body back to Star-jump Station, and placed it with reverence in the pitted little ship with which he had started his fabulous career. They knew that the brilliant life was gone, like the last ashes of a dying nova. And they knew that he had lead the way to the greatest era in the history of Man —

I knew the whole story, of course. I knew the force that drove him, I knew why he never came home. I knew the truth of the last night he had seen Marny, the bitterness in his eyes and voice as he left. I knew the depth of the love he had carried with him to the stars, and the horrible dread he held in his heart of ever again coming back to the earth he left, the dread of ever again seeing the girl he had loved. I knew the depth of that personal battle that drove him closer to the stars that were his, and ever away from the Earth which

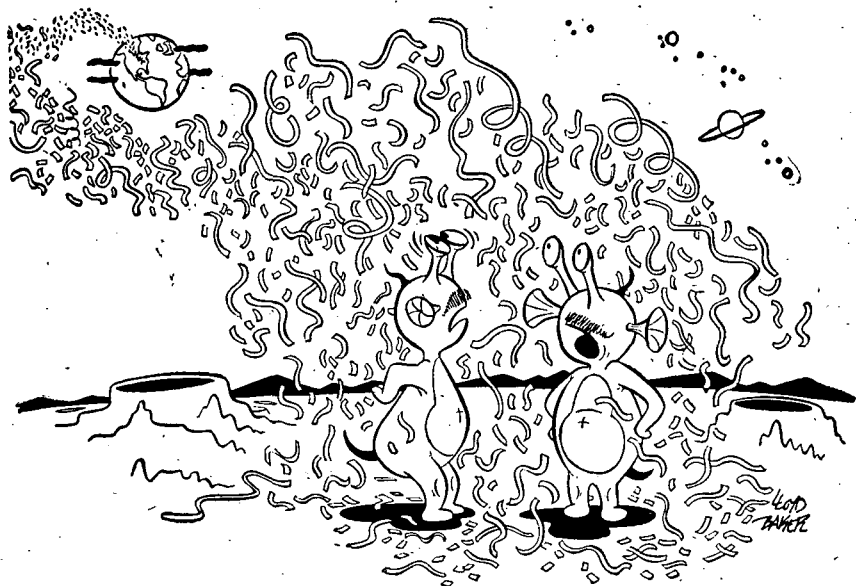
dealt him his greatest bitterness—

And the girl? Marny should be home very soon now. It's getting late, past 10:30, and the bridge-club never lasts later than 10:00. It's been a quiet, comfortable evening, without a call, but a storm is blowing up from the West, and the kids are getting restless. But, she'll be home very soon, and go upstairs to kiss the kids goodnight, and it'll be nice to lie in bed and listen to the thunder crack. Matter of fact, I think I heard the garage doors slamming just a minute or two ago. She still prefers the three-wheeler to the 'copter, particularly

with the parking problems we're having with 'copters these days. She should be in any minute.

But then, it may be a while before she comes. Sometimes she stops on the porch, and just stands there, staring up at the stars, if the night is clear. I've seen her, standing there for almost an hour, sometimes, just staring up at the blackness with tears in her eyes. But she always comes in, and I never ask her what she's been thinking. I don't think I'd want to know.

And me? I never look at the stars.



"They call it ticker tape. Probably a science fiction convention!"

# COMBATMAN

*By John Massie Davis*

**During colonizing operations a Combatman was always in charge — in case of trouble. This trip we really had some — a whole planet of it!**

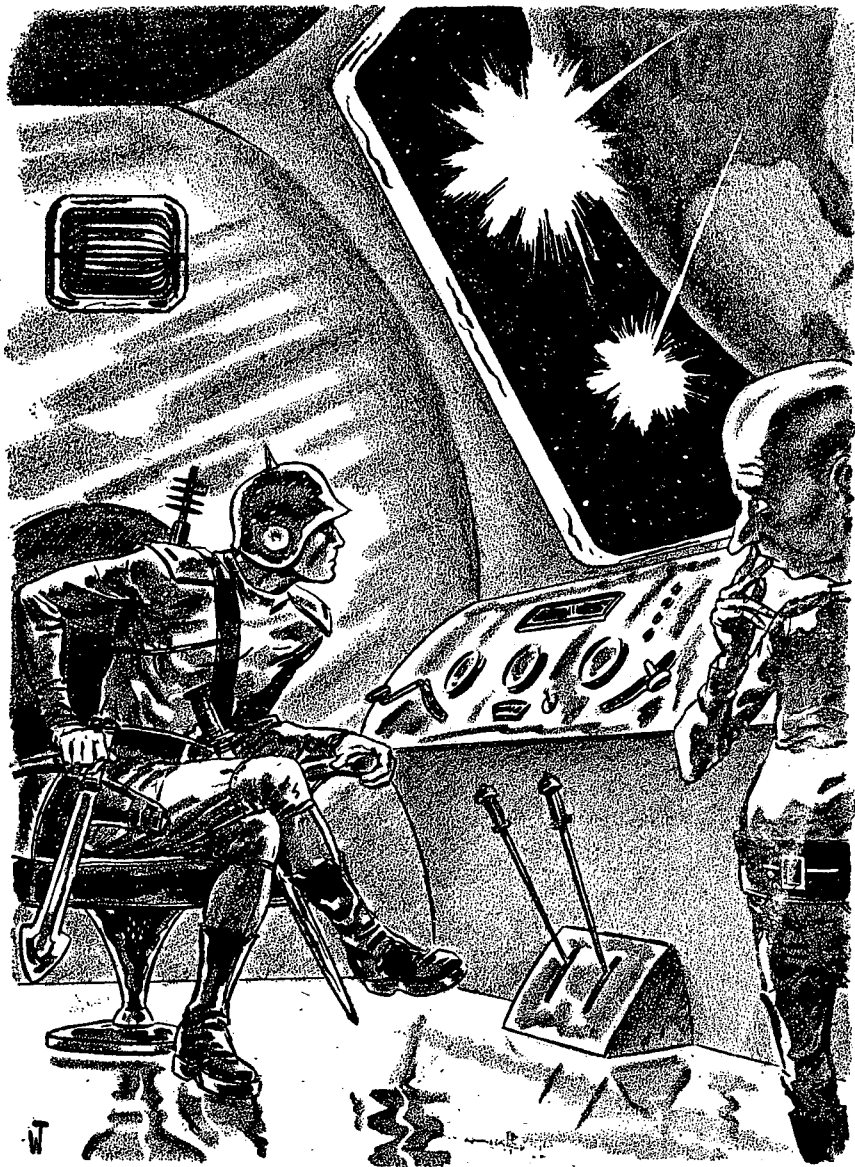
AS Computerman, I was the first to come out of deep freeze after we kicked clear of the Time-Warp. So I left the needles in my wrists—the tubes let me reach Brain One—and started punching data from the instruments while my fingers were still half stiff. Finally, stiff fingers or not, I had all the data racked into the primary feed and decided to check on the passengers. It amused me somewhat to note that even Brain One was strictly stalling for time when it came to figuring out where we were, and why. There was much buzzing and clicking but no tape feeding out, yet. Well, let the Brain figure it out. I had other things to do.

I strolled back to secondary freeze unit and checked Combatman. He was on top of the heap, of course—as stiff as a fresh steak, so I stuck the needles in his wrists and switched to defrost. Automatic lift pulled him out and beneath

him was the male Homonorm and the two female Homonorms. They came out, too, as the lifts worked, and pretty soon the cabin looked like a morgue—or a cannibal's shop, if you prefer. Anyway, they were defrosting, so I left 'em to make a check on Brain One and see what brilliant, if mechanical conclusion it had reached. Should be at least an hour before Combatman thawed—even with the needles pumping.

Brain One was feeding out tape now, slow as a snail considering its cycling rate, so I figured we were a long way from home. Okay with me—I'd been around and knew that if we could get somewhere we could get back. But I wanted, and wanted bad, the data from Time-Warp gauges. So I watched the tape, decoding mentally as it fed out and feeling, for a Computerman, an emotion similar to impatience.

We were approaching—the Brain



told me—a type three planet, radiations okay, atmosphere higher in oxygen than home, gravity slightly lighter in pull than normal—the same junk I'd been picking up since we started colonizing. Land masses stable, water in the air, semi-condensed. Good place for colonizing, and this pleased me. We were out to establish and leave the Homonorms for a generation, and Brain One had figured all the details out while I was sitting in freeze like a hamburger. So far, so good.

One thing annoyed, or puzzled me. I kept throwing data from TV and Radar into Feed-back and asking about population, life forms, land denizens. All Brain One came up with was Insufficient Data. All right. It would be just another routine landing on another distant planet. Then I heard the noise behind me and turned. Combatman stood in the doorway, his skin still bluish from the freeze, his eyes just clearing and working into focus.

I looked him over while he stood there, somewhat surprised—if one can ever be surprised at what his race did. He was hung with enough weapons to stop a division of Homonorms and I wondered, as I always did, at the origin of his race. His type always came drifting down from somewhere north, back home, and all our radar and planes

had never found their homeland. None of them ever talked with humans except to nose in on our expeditions or break up our wars. This one was quite a specimen, maybe six feet, about 180 pounds, with the quiet and arrogant strength of his race. He took a deep breath, still leaning on the door frame.

"Get me some whiskey," his voice was hoarse from disuse and the Time-Warp, "and get it now."

"Now, see here," I began, "I'm computerman and in charge of this ship and . . ."

**I** DIDN'T finish. With the quiet sureness of a jungle cat he had crossed the room, taken a handful of my tunic and lifted me from the chair—in spite of the fact that gravity was nearly normal now because of the landing jets. His voice was almost velvety.

"Perhaps you didn't hear me. I will repeat once more." He paused while I considered striking him and then, sensibly, changed my mind. "Get me some whiskey." Then he dropped me back into the chair.

I'm not Computerman for nothing, so I computed the situation in maybe a thousandth of a second. No one could push me around, so to prevent being pushed around I got him his whiskey. He knock-



ed off about a half pint at a swallow and in a few minutes his skin lost its bluish tinge. He was awake, and his quick eyes swept the gauges and the TV-Radar image.

"When do we land?" He made no attempt to be courteous.

I checked Brain One's tape, somewhat rattled. "Twenty-one minutes, four seconds," I started, resisting a strange impulse to say 'sir', "Near water, fresh, altitude under one mile from . . ."

"That's all," he said. "Thanks." He left the room like a cat, crouching slightly as he went through the door, leaping through and backing against the wall, but fast, once he cleared. His weapons, all of them, were so skillfully hung that he didn't make a sound. Somehow, I enjoyed watching the play of those muscles and felt rather glad to have him along, rough as he was. Outlying planets often have warlike combat organizations of their own, and Combatmen have saved many expeditions like this. Something in their nature, or training—or both—seems to make them invincible.

I turned back to Brain One, checked the wiring on the denizen circuit and tried to get more information about possible inhabitants. No luck. Either there were none or they were so highly civilized they could block off our probing

rays. That had happened before, and it usually meant a minor war. We always won, though we sometimes had to dig in and send for the Control Fleet from home. The Fleet was run by Combatmen, though no Homonorm had ever figured out how they eased into all the key positions. They were quite a race, all right.

So I sat watching the Radar-screen and the planet, enlarging rapidly. It looked pretty good—about a quarter to a third land mass, I guessed—just like home. Combatman came back in the room, quietly.

"Your pap-fed colonists are waking," he grunted. "Better go and wet-nurse them. They might catch cold." He sat down in the pilot's chair, much to my annoyance, and swilled away at his bottle. I noticed he'd replaced the original crock, and felt a moment's concern. After all, we depended for basic safety on his training, in the event of encountering hostility. He seemed utterly unconcerned as he lazily watched the screen.

THE Homonorms were doing all right, complaining as usual about the cold and asking silly questions about where we were and what year it was—or would be at home. I ducked the questions, gave them their hypos and went back to Brain One and the con-

trol panel. One look at controls and I started boiling; this was the last straw.

"Now, goddamit," I started, "you can boss me around, but when it comes to . . ."

"Shut up!"

"I will not shut up . . ."

"Okay." He was calm, leisurely, even—but before I realized it he was rising, crossed the room and I had an arm behind me. It didn't hurt but I felt pretty helpless. Completely helpless, to be truthful.

"Could it be," he appeared to be bored, "That you are tired of having two arms?" He twisted slightly and I got the idea so I shut up, for the second time. After a few seconds he sat down in my chair and had another drink. When I could talk without sputtering I worked up my mildest voice.

"Would you tell me," I almost choked on the next word, "*Please*, what in hell is the idea of circling at twenty miles, then dropping to ten and circling some more? We're wasting tons of fuel which we may need for—"

"Sure, brainy one, I'll tell you. I want to see what this place looks like and *I'm* picking the landing site. Not you or that pile of rattling tin there." He gestured contemptuously at Brain One.

"Pile of tin!" I couldn't say more so I went back to the rear

and helped the Homonorms find food and the simple plasticlothes they'd be wearing. The ship lurched suddenly as it changed course at twenty miles and started circling. Even back here I could hear Brain One clacking in protest over the conflicting instructions. That big lunk of a fighting man, of course, hadn't had sense enough to punch Clear and Recompute when he changed course and I could see the tape in my mind's eye pouring frantically out with Data Please, Data Please . . .

Oh, well.

Homonorms were thawing okay but crying like babies from Time-Warp sickness and space fright. I expected this and let them cry it out. Meanwhile I got busy with Sensory Receptors to see if anything we knew of could be blocking Brain One's circuits. This lack of info about the denizens had me a little worried: it wasn't often Brain One came up with a blank, on any subject. It made me furious to be working like mad here while that big oaf lounged in *my* chair sopping up a year's supply of stimulant. Defending the ship was his job; he should be trying to find out what was doing below us. Instead, he sat around watching Radarscreen just like he was watching the fights his race staged back home for amusement.

The ship lurched violently. Then

it lurched again. I started forward, worried, but the tailjets blasted and I slammed against a wall, pinned tight. The pressure cut my wind and I fainted. My last recollection was the smell of scorching duralumin. We'd been hit, by something.

WHEN I revived, we were back at Gravnorm and I staggered, literally, back to control. My nose was still bleeding, and the Homonorms, of course, were still unconscious. Combatman sat comfortably in my padded chair, almost dreamily watching the screen. I felt a surge of anger, then realized I was too feeble to support such an emotion. Remembering my Psycho training I redirected to curiosity.

"What . . ." my voice sounded pretty shaky and Combatman handed me the bottle, grinning.

"Quite a race down there," he seemed pleased. Then he spat, expertly, the result landing on the Radarscreen. "Can you work that thing?"

"Of course," I muttered, half-insulted.

"Okay. We're at a hundred miles. Get that in focus as of two miles, slow the ship and prepare to hold stationary when I see what I want to know."

Weakly I fumbled with the controls, sniffing back the blood from

my nose.

"And turn off this tin god of yours," he continued. "That clacking racket annoys me." Casually, he kicked the part of Brain One nearest him, which was the back of Wiring Panel Six.

"Oh, no . . ." I began. But I did as I was told and ran Brain One through three clearing cycles, just to make sure. There was no telling what this lummoX may have done in my absence. Now I'd have to check everything and feed in the information all over again.

Combatman leaned back in the chair like he expected dental work, and yawned luxuriously. He watched as the screen blurred and focused, blurred and focused. It was sweeping at two-miles and the ship was slowing. We dropped tail down and Grav changed faster than the interior hull moved. Finally we settled, and coasted above this planet.

The ship lurched, twice this time almost simultaneously. Then it lurched steadily. Combatman threw the All Screens switch and watched the Radar. By now, he was tense.

"At a hundred miles . . ." he muttered. "What a race this is!"

He watched the screen with eyes that reminded me more of a cat's than a human's.

"Stop!"

From habit I threw the master

Out Switch and everything stopped—our motion coordinated precisely with the planet's, the Radar focused where it had been—and I got slammed against a wall again, of course. Well—I might as well get used to it. When my eyes cleared I studied the image. It was a rather crude city of considerable size, though poorly designed from the light, ventilation and transport angle. There was considerable movement, apparently ground vehicles of some sort. Then I looked at Combatman. His face was registering disbelief and something resembling alarm—though I'd never heard of any of his race being really frightened.

THE missile warning light blinked frantically and the ship started lurching and pitching again. Combatman turned toward me and his face was taut and urgent.

"How soon can you get into Time-Warp?"

"And—and *leave*?"

"Right, and the sooner the better." He flipped the height control and we moved, smoothly this time, up away from the missiles blasting outside our protective screen. "There'll be no colonizing done here."

"But-but our orders were to . . ."

"No colonizing here. Put your Homonorms back in the freezer and

set up for return. Do it now."

Stunned, I went rearward and told the people. They didn't like the idea very much, but regulations said that when the ship was attacked, Combatman was absolute boss. Then I returned. Combatman shot a glance at me and I nodded, then went to work on the Control panel, reversing the whole set up.

"When you finish I'll get in your ice box," Combatman said. "And when you get out of Time-Warp destroy that wiring. None of your ships is to come back here."

I digested this slowly, wondering how to report to the council. "Why not?" I ventured. "Perhaps with part of the Control Fleet . . ."

"The whole Control Fleet wouldn't last two days on a desert of that world, Brainboy," he said. His eyes misted faintly for a fraction of a second. "Those denizens, as you call them, are all members of my race, and this planet was my home—we called it Earth."

He yawned and strode to the rear and the freezer. At the portal he turned and grinned. "And don't ask me how we get back and forth. I might get mad and have my whole family drop over—in-laws and all."

I didn't really understand him, so went on with my wiring.



## Electronic Chemists



THE test-tube, the beaker and the Bunsen Burner are becoming old-hat in modern chemical laboratories — chemistry today is a branch of electronics! Two instruments have come from physics, the spectrograph and the mass spectrometer. Both of these tools are electronic marvels and they enable chemists to analyze complex substances in a matter of minutes instead of hours and days—and with superior accuracy.

Companies which used to have huge laboratories and hundreds of chemists, now employ a few technicians and these versatile instruments. A specimen to be analyzed is placed in an electric arc; a minute later a chart is removed which shows exactly what elements were present. Spectroscopic analysis of the *light* did the job!

The mass spectrometer on the

other hand vaporizes the substance and then weighs its components, atom by atom, molecule by molecule—and presents the results on a strip of paper.

These two tools are the chemical labs of the future. The companies which manufacture them, cannot do so rapidly enough, so acceptable are they in modern science. Scientists now envision the near future when these miraculous analytical instruments will be hooked up directly into the manufacturing scheme, controlling the flow of materials, and making truly robot, automatic chemical factories. These events are only decades away—or less. To present a picture of fifty years hence would probably be difficult; it would be so strange and radical that it'd be hard to believe. The electronic chemist is here!



"Now, you're all agreed on staying?"

# So Says The Master

By

Daniel F. Galouye

**Earthmen had been conditioned to serve their conquering masters; and yet Irola dared to attempt an escape — with no place to hide!**

AS the sun hid itself behind the ancient, gutted towers of masonry that rose like tottering skeletons, Irola, in a crouch, ran behind what might have once been a brick wall. On the other side of the wall was one of the roads that had been built by the invaders—the “masters.” Behind her was the working quarters which she shared with the other Class A females, women who were intelligent but too small, too weak to offer physical resistance to the dictates of the conquerors.

Ahead was a breach in the wall that might betray her flight. She paused, breathing heavily, and rearranged the single garment which covered her. Then she peered cautiously around the jagged stones, careful not to let herself be seen in the masters’ artificial light that reinforced the twilight.

The activity whose sounds had

beat at her ears from the other side of the wall had its origin in the “arena,” only a stone’s throw away. She had often heard of the horrors that were staged there for the delight of the masters.

She gasped.

In the center of the lighted field, surrounded by wildly gesturing and cheering masters, two humans of Class Indeterminate were locked in deadly combat. One was a monstrosity with six arms and a thorny tail. The other was a barrel-chested, two headed nightmare whose snarling lips exposed inch-long fangs.

Stifling a scream of revulsion, Irola trembled as her eyes turned to the “prize”—an inadequately-dressed girl who sat in the dust of the arena, leaning forward in imbecilic pleasure, ear lobes hanging past her shoulders and legs sprouting claws instead of feet.





The two-headed ogre sank its fangs into his foe, evoking a scream of torment. The deformed girl laughed delightfully and the masters roared their approval.

Irola darted across the breach and continued her flight.

There *were* worse lots than belonging to Class A and working in the laboratories, she reassured herself. But suddenly she stopped again, shaking with a new-found fright. She *no longer* belonged to Class A! She had . . . *escaped!* And the penalty for that crime was—transfer to Class Indeterminate . . .

Could she return now? Could she cover the evidences of her escape and avert the penalty?

She looked across the ruins into the dusk that was gathering over the forest beyond. Somewhere out there must be *free* humans, men and women who had escaped the heel of the conqueror from another world—who had successfully remained out of the stock pens and who bore and reared their children normally, not through the artificial insemination methods which insured selective breeding.

She stiffened resolutely and strode forward. Ahead was the Class C male pens . . . filled with big men. Men who were muscular and stupid, like the masters wanted them. Surely there would be none among them with sufficient

mentality to see through the lies she would tell to defeat his loyalty to the invaders . . . She would need one powerful enough to ward off the perils which must exist in a forest that had known no human control for centuries.

IT was dark now, but a full moon provided ample light for Irola to survey the pens from concealment behind a boulder. She listened inattentively to the sluggish conversation of the scores of Class C men huddled under the lean-to in the nearest enclosure.

A half hour passed and still she had not moved, nor had any of the males left their shelter. Cautiously, she crawled forward, reached out and grasped the wire fence, rattling it slightly. Perhaps one of them would come to investigate the noise.

But none did. Was it a wise plan she wondered suddenly. Could she dare hope one of them would be tricked by her story? Not that she couldn't tell it convincingly. But it was possible they wouldn't even give her a chance to speak when they saw she was a Class A woman outside of her area. Their loyalty was blind; their devotion to the conquerors infinite. The overlords had made them that way.

No. She couldn't chance it. She would have to face the dan-

gers of the forest alone. She squirmed away from the enclosure.

Too late!

One of them had heard. He had left the lean-to and was cautiously approaching. A giant of a man—was were all the Class C's—he came forward, his broad shoulders sagging, head cocked attentively as though he were an animal ferretting out a scent. He wore only a single cloth around his loin.

Already Irola was closer than she had ever been to a male of her own race.

Now he was at the fence, his brute fingers entwined in the mesh. The face that peered through the wire squares offered paradoxes. There was the perplexed frown, the constant idiotic expression. But yet there seemed to be an intentness—an animal alertness—in the dense features.

Terrified, she shrank before his huge physical proportions. He was at least a head and a half taller than she and he must weigh more than twice as much.

His eyes searched the area outside the enclosure; studied the boulder ten feet away from her, swept over to the bush behind which she lay only half concealed.

Then he saw her and stiffened, his mouth falling open as he drew in a deep draught of air for a shout.

"I come for the masters!" she said hastily, in a trembling voice. His mouth closed and his frown etched itself deeper. She was tense as she rose before him.

"Masters?" he repeated sluggishly, as though he had never heard of them.

Could it be that the Class C males were less agile, mentally, than she had suspected?

His frown disappeared. "The masters!" he said with final comprehension. "They *spoke* with you? You saw them *up close*? They sent you to see . . . *me*? The vocal anxiety erupted into what Irola imagined was awe.

"Yes," she lowered her voice to a whisper, hoping he would do the same. "The master of the masters came to me and said, 'Irola, you must go and tell' . . ."

Her voice broke off abruptly. She had tricked *herself* by starting to use his name when she did not know it!

" . . . Go and tell Ralen . . . " he prompted, nodding his head eagerly.

"Yes, that's right," she affirmed, assured now that she had overestimated the Class C intellect. "They said I must find Ralen and tell him to accompany me into the forest; to protect me so I can bring a message to the next city."

Bewilderment returned to his face.

"They want you to help me get to the next settlement of the masters . . . The masters here *are in danger!*"

He tightened his grip on the fence and the mesh strained and stretched under the force. Two strands of wire snapped with a *plunk*. "Earthmen want to hurt the masters?" he demanded.

"No . . . the bad masters. There are bad masters here who want to steal the Earthmen and kill the good masters!"

A low, deep noise sounded in his throat. It was almost like a growl.

"The bad masters are trying to grab the good ones and punish them," she continued. "If they try to tell masters in other cities of their plight, the evil ones will take over right away. Even if one of the good masters tries to leave to deliver the message, the bad ones will know something has gone wrong and will strike without waiting."

Irola watched his eyes narrow and his muscles tighten. "The good masters," he muttered remorsefully. "The good masters are in danger!"

"But we can help them," she offered quickly. "They have picked you and me to take the message . . . Will you go?"

Ralen grunted and his biceps expanded as he forced apart his hands, still entwined in the wire

mesh. Wire after wire snapped until the fence was ripped almost in two. Then he stepped through the gap.

"We will go," he said in a steady voice that showed no sign of exertion.

Boldly, he leaped over a slab of concrete and strode off. She followed. Ahead, the forest, damp in its nightly blanket of dew, glistened enchantingly under the rising moon.

"**WE** must rest, Ralen!" Irola called to the tireless man who strode some forty paces ahead of her. "I can't go any farther!"

She dropped to the still damp forest floor. A shaft of sunlight found its way through the foliage and encircled her figure like the big spotlights the invaders used to inspect the Class A pens at night. It drew her attention to the sky and she realized they had been traveling due west.

They had started out the previous night with her leading on a southwestward course. But he had taken over the lead and had veered to the right. She started to call his attention to the change in direction. But what difference did it make? If there were free humans out here, it was just as likely that they would be west as southwest.

He had retraced the distance between them and now stood towering over her. "We must hurry. We must-help the masters."

"We have time." Irola sighed off the dimishing effects of rapid breathing. "It may take days to reach the next city."

"But the masters are in danger!"

Wasn't he capable of ever forgetting about the invaders? "We must go slowly, carefully, so we will be sure to get there . . . so said the masters."

"But . . ."

"The master's orders!" she cut him short.

•He dropped on the ground beside her and lay on his back, his hands cupped beneath his head.

Suddenly apprehensive, she eased away. The power that was in that chest that bulged like the gnarled root beneath her! In the huge arms! She imagined that he could crush her skull with but a casual blow of his rock-like fist.

Irola closed her eyes and shuddered. She had not been wise. She had not thought the plan out to its conclusion. Thus far, she had succeeded. But eventually suspicion would well in his fogged mind when he realized they were not arriving at another city. She would have to admit they were lost. And only she would be there to feel the brunt of his anger.

Cautiously, her hand went to the hem of her garment, fingered the double material . . . it was still there. Reassuringly, she felt the hidden case that held the single needle, its tip stained with the deadly poison that the conquerors used to destroy the useless mutants.

It would require but a single scratch of his skin—when the time came. She had stolen the needle and treated it in the laboratory to be used on him should they actually find free humans.

Abruptly, she wondered whether she would be able to kill him. He was huge and tall, but not grotesquely so, as she had imagined all Class C males were. She remembered the folklore passed on to her in her childhood—the tales of pre-invasion days. By the standards of the pre-overlords period, perhaps Ralen would be considered . . . would "pretty" be the correct word? she wondered.

Irola was aware his eyes were upon her. Awkwardly, she stared back at him, then turned away. She tried to fathom his expression. The oafish frown was no longer there. Nor was he smiling—not exactly.

Almost fearfully, she rose and walked off. Still his eyes followed her, strange in their inscrutable intentness, suggestive of a hidden mental attitude which she could

not understand.

She gasped and hurried her steps as he rose and followed. Now she was remembering the folklore again. There was a time when males and females lived together, shared the same quarters even. Relationship was on an entirely different plane then. She wondered whether she could outrun him, but glanced at his corded muscles and decided she could not.

"Irola," he called.

She puzzled over the sudden friendliness in his voice.

But there was a roaring noise overhead and she looked up in time to see one of the overlords' flying vehicles floating slowly by.

"The masters!" Ralen shouted.

"The bad ones!" she cried alarmingly, darting into a bush.

He merely stood motionless. She started to call out to him to hide, but saw that he was luckily hidden beneath the branches of a thick tree.

The vehicle and its noise disappeared and Ralen walked up to help her from the bush. But he did not let go of her hand immediately.

"The masters . . ." she reminded uneasily. "We must get to the city."

Again the blank expression was on his face. "We will go and deliver the message as the master says."

She sighed and withdrew her hand from the lump in her garment. As long as the mentioning of the word "masters" held its hypnotic compulsion she need not use her weapon.

THE forest was huge and frightening and Irola, faced with increasing apprehension each step that took her deeper into the unknown sea of whispering leaves and stately bark columns.

On the few occasions that she had viewed it from elevated levels in the invaders' laboratories, it had appeared as a slender finger of suffused green that lay like a corridor between twin mountain chains. Then, it had been inviting. But now it was depressing, ominous in its quiet.

It was near the end of the first day when they came upon the clearing that stretched like a broad band across the valley, from mountain to mountain. As always, the silent Ralen was at least a score of paces ahead of her, his eyes shifting nervously from side to side to detect any unknown dangers that might lie there.

At the edge of the clearing, however, he paused and she overtook him.

Wearily, she leaned panting against a tree. "We've got to stop," she implored. "I can't go any farther!"

He eyed her questioningly. "The masters. We cannot . . ."

Irola bit her lips. Why hadn't she thought of some other ruse? There were evidently no dangers in the forest, as she had suspected. Without him, her escape and search for other free humans would have been simple . . . But still, she admitted, it was reassuring to know he was there should she need him.

Resolutely, she squared her shoulders and stepped off into the clearing.

The guttural sound he made was a warning. He seized her arm and pulled her roughly back beneath the trees. Then, motioning her to stay there, he advanced cautiously, searching the sky as he went.

A hundred yards out, he turned slowly, scanning the entire sky. Then he beckoned. His pace was slower and she was able to stay by his side as they pushed across the expanse of ankle-deep vegetation.

"Ralen," she asked impulsively, tired of his silence, "what is it like in your pen?"

"It is nice. The masters let us fight when we want to. And they beat us with their whips of light only when we need it."

Punishment for the Class A workers was more subtle, but probably just as effective. Irola remembered her two sessions with

the injection that had been known to drive women crazy.

"You have been punished?" she asked.

He turned to expose the pencil-mark scars on his back where energy beams had raked the flesh. She had noticed them before.

"But the masters did not burn me more than they had to," he said defensively. "That was when they put the female in our pen to see what would happen."

She looked at him expectantly.

"We tore her apart." He shrugged. "The masters were angry. They said we should have waited and killed her later." Ralen looked at her imploringly. "But we couldn't think of anything else to do that would make them laugh."

With a returning pang of fear, she moved away from him and dropped slightly behind. She wondered abruptly whether she could hope to make him understand the undistorted facts about the masters and the humans—the invasion. Could she expect him to comprehend that through generations the Class C males had been reduced to loyal beasts? That through Mendelian recombinations other specialized classes of humans had been bred, such as her own which were intended to assume quasi-intellectual duties?

Despondently, she shook her

head. It was hopeless. Even the capacity to understand had been bred out and his only reaction to her exposure of the "beloved masters" would be a murderous attack as he realized he had been tricked.

THEY were almost half way across the clearing when he stopped and stiffened, holding up a hand in a gesture demanding silence.

Frantically, he searched the horizon . . . and growled.

She saw them too—the three black specks that grew larger with alarming speed, advancing from their rear.

Crying out, she started to race back for the safety of the forest. But suddenly she was swept off her feet and found herself hanging across his massive shoulder, the bulging muscle jogging into her abdomen as he raced toward safety much swifter than her own legs would have carried her.

The first vehicle had become a well-defined object silhouetted against high clouds and they were still an infinity away from the refuge of the trees.

They could not make it.

"Let me down!" She beat against his back with her small fists.

If only he would release her he might be able to save himself. She

started to tell him as much. But then she realized she had handed him a mandate from the "good masters" to protect her.

The lead vehicle, screeching its vengeance as it flayed the air in near supersonic flight, broke out over the edge of the trees and bore down upon them. Lances of white light-fire etched criss-cross lines on the ground on either side of them. Then the craft was but a dot on the opposite horizon as it streaked toward the setting sun and began its banked turn.

The second vehicle followed, wallowing in the tortured air that was the wake of the first. Again there were loud blasts as the pencil flames groped ruthlessly for their fleeing forms.

She heard Ralen's grunt of pain and felt him falter. But he steadied himself and ran on while the third craft spewed its intended torture and death about them.

Irola screamed as one of the white hot knives of light slashed across the soft flesh of her calves. Another raked her thigh. She closed her eyes and fought the agony, warding off a faint.

When she opened her eyes again, they were back in the forest and Ralen was lowering her to the ground. The sounds of the airborne overlord crafts were darting sibilances.

She looked up at Ralen. There



were three streaks of seared flesh across his chest and one on each of his thighs.

"Hurt?" he asked.

She had not expected that much compassion of him. She nodded.

He turned to the tree behind him and scraped bark from it with his nails, stuffing the flakes into his mouth. Irola forgot her pain as she puzzled over his odd behavior.

Standing before her, he chewed the bark for perhaps three minutes before he spat the mouthful into his hand. Then he gripped her ankle with surprising tenderness as he spread the pulp evenly over her burns.

Almost immediately the sting was gone. Frowning in her failure to understand the origin of his primitive knowledge of medical application, she watched him treat his own wounds.

"It is almost dark," he said, tossing away the rest of the brown paste. "We will cross the clearing then."

Why, she wondered, did they have to cross?

"You said the other city was over there." He pointed westward.

She had said so, she remembered, earlier during the day. Exhausted, she fell back on the ground. He dropped down beside her and lay looking up at the sky. She wanted to move away—place

a reassuring distance between them. But the impulse was lost in the fatigue that gnawed at her entire body.

She must have dozed. When she was conscious of being awake a few moments later, she realized her head was resting on his relaxed arm. She sighed contentedly and was soon fully asleep.

A SOOTHING, rocking motion accompanied her awakening. She stiffened. But an arm tightened under her thighs and another under her back. He was walking with her in his arms. Her eyelids snapped open and she looked up, squinting in the darkness to discern features of a face that stared sternly ahead.

They had crossed the clearing, she surmised, and were well into the forest on the other side. A star-filled sky lay overhead beyond the half-concealing foliage. From the east, the moon's rays were slicing down through openings in the umbrella of leaves to flicker against Ralen's swaying face, accentuating the lines of his puzzling frown.

Idiotic expression? She wondered. Or did something else lie deep underneath. Was there a basic intelligence—perhaps of a type different from hers—which she could not comprehend? Had something been bred out of her,

too, that robbed her and the other Class A's of the ability to understand the Class C's? Perhaps to him she appeared as stupid.

But she dismissed the perplexing thoughts and let her cheek drop back against his biceps. As he walked through a patch of moonlight, he looked down at her and smiled.

It was not a personal smile, however, she realized. Actually his single interest in her was providing the protection that the masters had indicated. For a moment she had started to visualize not finding free humans in the forest. She had even been bold enough to imagine she might convert this man. Then eventually there *would* be a race of people free from the wrath of the conquerors.

But the situation was an impossible one. The moment he learned she actually did not want to reach another city but had tricked him, he would turn on her hatefully and destroy her as the males of his pen had destroyed the female who had been sacrificed for the delight of the overlords.

"Hungry?" Ralen asked suddenly.

She realized that she was—almost desperately so.

She nodded. "But there is nothing we can eat."

He placed her on the ground and grasped a furry, limp form that

hung from the band of his loin-cloth; held it up in front of him. In the moonlight she saw that it was a small, dead creature . . . meat. But she had never eaten raw animal flesh before! The idea was revolting and she started to protest.

"We will build a fire and roast it," he explained, "as soon as we find a place where the light won't shine up into the sky."

Not far ahead they found it—a deep ravine with overhanging ledges and concealed from the sky by a lush growth of vegetation.

Then, as she huddled in a crevice in the rocks to keep warm, he knelt with two sticks in his hands. His behavior was perplexing, but she knew she must disregard it, because she could never hope to understand anyone from the Class C male pens. So she closed her eyes and dozed.

But when Irola awoke, there was a blazing fire where Ralen had rubbed the sticks and the aroma which was wafted to her nostrils was one of roasting meat.

While they ate in silence she considered the unanticipated abilities he was showing. There was his alertness to guard against being detected as they entered the clearing; his familiarity with primitive means of treating wounds; his ability to capture prey, build a fire.

Surely, through their induced mutations, the conquerors must have produced in the Class C males reversions to the primitive type—beasts who were but cave-men endowed with vocal faculties. But was it possible that the building of a fire could be the expression of an instinct? She wished she knew more about instincts.

With his unexpected knowledge of primitive survival means, it was very likely that he could maintain an existence in the forest for both of them.

"Ralen," she called impulsively, having arrived at her decision. "What would you do if I told you there were no evil masters; that they were all—good? Suppose I said I just told you a lie to make you desert them?"

He dropped the portion of meat which he had been eating and sprang up, fists clenched. His face was a threatening mask of realization and hate as he stepped toward her. Frantically, her hand shot down to the hem of her garment.

But he stopped and laughed. "I know!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "You're just testing me! You want to see if I'm loyal to the masters!"

A roaring sound abruptly filled the night air above the crackling of the fire.

Ralen whirled and used a stone to push the burning branches into the stream that flowed in the cen-

ter of the ravine. Then he splashed water on the embers.

The sound died away as the overlords' craft went out of range in the other direction. But the fact that they may have been discovered made little impression on Irola.

Her hand still fumbled at the hem of her garment. Where the case, with its deadly needle had been concealed was only a rip in the material.

Horried, she ran her hands over the ground in front of her. But finally the conviction became positive—she no longer had even the meager advantage of the weapon over him now!

**A** GAIN Irola purposely lagged behind as he cautiously picked his way through the woods the next day. Rays of the sun pierced the forest almost perpendicularly, but the dense growth excluded the midday heat.

The random course which he was following was beginning to lead upward now along the gently sloping face of a mountain that had been on their right. And she fought the incline with exaggerated effort, creating the impression that her sluggishness was unavoidable. Perhaps if she stayed far enough behind she would find her chance to escape.

But never did he allow himself

to draw too far ahead. And always was he glancing back to see whether she was still in sight.

Sighing, she paused to rest at a spot where the incline was particularly steep. He stopped too, a hundred paces ahead, and sat looking in her direction.

Did he know she was trying to get away from him? Could he suspect she was falling behind only so that she could dart off and lose herself in the immensity of the forest?

Suddenly he was on his feet, his eyes strained with concern as he glanced back down into the valley from which they had come. She turned and followed his riveted stare.

Air vehicles of the conquerors!

But they weren't headed in her direction. Instead, the four crafts—much larger than the ones which had chased them on the previous day—circled over the clearing in which the attack had occurred.

Then like vultures coming to rest, they glided down to the level, open surface, three of them landing at the forest's fringe on the far side and one stopping close to the spot where she and Ralen had entered the woods after crossing the clearing.

As though on signal, the four vehicles spilled out their occupants simultaneously.

Irola gasped.

There were furiously gesturing overlords, armed with the light-whip guns, as she had expected. But there were humans too . . . Class Indeterminates!

Terrorized, she turned to look at Ralen. His arm was in motion in front of him, gesturing to her to conceal herself . . . Or, *was* it a signal intended for her? As she ducked behind a ridge, she wondered whether he might not have been trying to attract the attention of the overlords. After all, he had stopped when she saw him and it almost seemed that he had flustered.

She glanced back at him. He was motionless, cautiously watching the activity in the field . . . Now was her chance—while his eyes were not upon her!

Slowly, in order to make no noise, she worked her way along the ridge, out of his line of sight. Then she paused briefly to look back into the clearing.

Two masters were leading six Indeterminates into the woods, in their direction. A shudder of revulsion raced through her as she squinted to discern the impossible forms of the creatures whose ancestors, presumably, were human.

There was one of the six-armed monsters, all powerful appendages writhing, flailing the air expectantly, anxious to exert its restrained energy in a manner pleasing to the

masters.

Another monstrosity hugged the ground, speeding forward on four legs. It had no arms, but even from the great distance Irola could make out the grotesque features of its face—the huge nose, its great nostrils flaring out trumpet-like as it skimmed over the ground to pick up the spoor of the prey.

Waiting to see no more of the biological travesties, she whirled and dashed into the thick growth. It was better this way—not only was she removing herself from Ralen's inevitable attack of instinct, for which he could not be held accountable, but she was also perhaps providing for her own survival. Under no circumstances could she be *with* this Class C man should they be overtaken! If the animal pack were not loosed upon her to tear her apart, she would surely fall before Ralen's wrath when he learned she had tricked him into disloyalty!

HER flight took her down through a deep, dark gorge and up again to a higher elevation where she perspired under the heat of the sun in a relatively cleared area.

Then she was in deep shadows once more, racing between the trunks of huge trees, tripping over exposed roots and picking herself

up only to run on again until exhaustion was a searing flame in her breast.

But she must not stop!

Once she paused to gulp water from an icy stream and dash the cooling liquid on her face and across her shoulders. Then she splashed across the brook and tripped and fell on the other side.

As she rose laboriously, she wondered what would happen to Ralen if he were caught. Perhaps he was not in as much danger as she thought. If they questioned him before allowing the pack to attack him, they would learn he had not been disloyal. In the simplicity of his defense, he would be believed.

Maybe it was better that she had left him—better for him. If they were overtaken together, Ralen would feel compelled to protect her, as required by his dictate from the "good master," and would surrender his life to the false cause.

Ever upward she ran, at times having to claw her way from root to root in areas where the incline was too steep to maintain her footing.

After a while the ground leveled somewhat and she was able to increase her speed. It was then that she noticed the sky darkening and streaks of lightning were playing across the crest of mountains

on the other side of the valley.

Hope surged and her lips moved in a prayer. The storm was advancing and the rain would destroy any evidence that could lead the pack along her trail! Already the small black clouds that heralded its approach were growing in size as they moved overhead toward the mountain tops in front of her.

A low rumble of thunder growled in the distance and was echoed against a nearby peak. A drop of rain found its way down through the leaves and splattered on her shoulder.

Her body became limp as she realized the extent of her exhaustion and she dropped to the ground beside another small stream, lying on her chest and sucking in mouthfuls of water to cool her seared throat.

Now she could allow herself a moment's rest. But her fatigue was overpowering and she felt a sleep of exhaustion beginning to seize a paralyzing grip on her. Desperately, she tried to fight it off. But tortured muscles offered no resistance.

Abruptly there was a splashing and water from the stream sprayed over her again. She regained full consciousness with a start.

Ralen knelt by the side of the stream scooping water into his mouth with cupped hands!

**S**PEECHLESS, she stared terror-stricken, waiting for his vengeful reaction to her attempted escape.

He turned. "That was good. I did not know you could run so fast. We have come far from them now."

She regarded him misgivingly, suspicion beating down her fear. Was he trying to create the impression he thought her dash for freedom was but part of their flight? Or was he actually dull-witted enough not to notice she had been trying to get away?

The rain that had started to tinkle musically against waxen leaves was falling no longer. She searched the sky and was not quite sure the storm would sweep over their immediate area—perhaps not even over any of the section between them and their pursuers. Their trail would not be obliterated after all. With that conviction, she was once more gripped with the urgency of flight.

Ignoring his presence, Irola rose and started up the mountain. But before she had gone ten steps, she felt his stout hand clamp down on her shoulder.

Repressing a scream, she lurched to tear herself free. But he lifted her into his arms. Then he was trotting against the current in the center of the stream.

Why hadn't *she* thought of that?

She could have used any one of the numerous streams over which she had leaped as a means of concealing her escape trail. Why was it that again the intelligence of a Class A woman had seemed to bow before the unexpected intuitive knowledge of a savage?

At least, she realized, his present action was in one respect proof that he had not been trying to signal the masters from his hill-side position. He would not try to attract them one minute, then evade them the next.

Farther upstream, they reached a fork and he selected the right-hand brook, but slowed his pace as the incline steepened and the rocky bed become more treacherous.

After they passed two more forks in the erratic system of converging rivulets, the sky darkened once more and lightning flashed to the accompaniment of roaring thunder that shook the forest.

Then the rain came. But they received a temporary reprieve from a drenching as they followed the stream through a deep gorge.

Irola tightened her grip on his shoulder and pointed. "There. We can stop until the storm is over." She directed his gaze to a recess in the wall of the gorge.

He stopped and put her down in the stream beside him. His expression was a protest. "We will

not stop. We will continue until we reach the city."

But Irola ducked under the ledge and shivered as she gained relief from the chilling current of air that swept through the gorge.

"We must rest here, Ralen." She turned to explore the recess. It extended farther into the face of the cliff than she thought. "Even if the bad masters should come this way they will pass us without realizing it."

"We continue to the city!" He caught her arm in a strong grip.

She could go no farther. Two nights without sleep. Two days of running. Only a handful of food. Couldn't he realize that she was vastly inferior, physically, to him?

Mustering her courage, she faced him bravely. "You will listen to me, Ralen." The words were as stern as she could make them. "You must do what I tell you. The master said so. We will rest so that I can deliver the message."

There was confusion on his face as lines of fatigue fought another expression which she could not understand. For a moment it seemed the fatigue was going to win and he would fall in exhaustion on the pebble strewn floor of the recess. But his features were strengthened again from an inner energy and he stood looking appraisingly at her, an inscrutable smile beginning



to form at the corners of his mouth.

Alarmed, she backed away. She was beginning to realize the significance of the smile now. He advanced. But even in his bestial disposition he had not the presence of mind to block off the entrance to the recess in his approach.

Her eyes filled with terror, she started to lunge for the exit. But how far could she run? Would her numb legs take her even as far as the stream?

He was almost upon her.

"The master!" she shouted. "The master said you must protect me! He will be angry!"

His face relaxed. Was it a surrender to the almost magical phrases which she had invoked? Or was it submission to the inner weariness that he could not resist?

Like a wounded giant, he lowered himself to the ground and dropped his head into the crook of an arm. For a moment, he watched her.

She lay at the other end of the recess. But she desperately fought the paralyzing sleep which was trying to seize her in its unrelenting grip. She must stay awake! She must be ready to push on as soon as he fell asleep. The words had restrained him this time. But would they the next?

**K**EEP going, *Irola!* the voice within commanded. *Don't stop to rest! You'll never awaken!*

Her legs were numb, throbbing stumps and the fire in her throat was a volcano as she stumbled on through the forest—through the night.

There was so much she had to run from! There were the masters and their hateful slave culture, and the monstrosities which they bred to hunt down and destroy anyone permitted intelligence who tried to escape. And, if her life were spared, there was the equally horrifying future of existence in Class Indeterminate.

But these were the fears she knew—the fears which she fled because she could not be more convinced of their horrors. It was the unknown fear that plagued her most—the fear of Ralen. He could kill, or he could love—or he could do both at the same time. Of all the monstrosities, this was the one that loomed most grotesquely.

A lingering drop that clung to the tip of a leaf long after the rain had stopped splashed upon her arm. It startled her into the realization that she no longer was running; that she had unconsciously paused to lean gasping for breath against the rough bark of a tree.

She went forward again — this time in a staggering walk — for-

ward and upward, ever climbing.

Why was she going up? What sire of compulsion was it that was forcing her to flee uphill? Long ago, she realized suddenly, she should have headed back downhill, on a course obliquely away from her pursuers. Why hadn't she? What had clouded her rational processes to force her ever upward?

Unable to answer the questions, she forgot about them and continued up the incline. Her mind was blank for an indeterminate period, then she was aware that her course was taking her across level ground once more — on an elevated valley between two white mountain peaks which glistened in the light of the low-hanging moon.

And again she was conscious of only numbness where there should have been thought. When the period of near unconsciousness was over, it was dawn.

Now she was stumbling through tall grass and thorny bushes and around large boulders. She collided with one of the rocks and realized she could go no farther. Clinging to the slick, damp surface for support, she felt herself slipping.

But she stiffened abruptly. Behind her there had been a noise! A low, human, or at least semi-human sound—part snort, part growl,

part whimper of eagerness.

It could be neither human nor Class C individual who had made the noise. An ember of frenzy flared against her spiritlessness and she staggered onward, trying futilely to run.

She had covered perhaps a quarter of a mile toward the other edge of the valley before she tried to tell herself she had heard nothing—had only imagined that one of the scouting monstrosities was overtaking her.

But even as she faltered, the sound erupted again behind her. She whirled, arms partly upraised in a feeble attempt at warding off any charge that might be under way. But there was none.

Less than a hundred yards off, however, she watched the motion of tall grass betray the presence of . . . of what?—*One of the crawling monsters.*

Turning she stumbled, fell, picked herself up and stumbled again. Finally she regained her feet and stood swaying dizzily. Where was she fleeing? Through dazed eyes, she surveyed the landscape ahead, on either side . . . She was stumbling into a trap!

Tall cliffs bounded the valley on three sides. The only exit was the corridor through which she had entered! She looked back toward the forest which lay across its mouth.

And the growl-like guttural rumbled again.

She had not the energy left for a scream as she turned to face her original line of flight . . . and pitched forward on her face.

But even as she fell a final wave of terror washed over her . . . From ahead, bearing down on her, hands clawing the air in anticipation, came one of the six arm creatures!

**I**ROLA twisted to escape its initial thrust.

And, in doing so, she saw the flash of white skin and corded muscles comprising a body of towering height that swept past her to meet the charge of the man-beast.

The two giant forms collided and fell to the ground only feet from where she lay.

She watched Ralen's hands struggle against the six battering fists and finally reach the stout, furry throat. His grip slipped once, but he restored it and pressed his face close against the thing's shoulder to escape the murderous blows.

A half-dozen fists pounded his body incessantly, leaving crimson welts. But the ferocity of the struggle diminished, until finally the last of the numerous arms fell limply to the ground.

"Ralen!" Irola gasped, rising to her knees. "Back there, in the grass! There's another one!"

His smile was weak as he used a trembling hand to brush tousled hair from his face. "I killed it," he said simply.

Despite her state of near collapse, perplexity forced a frown on her face. "I heard nothing."

He took her arm and lifted her up. "Let's go."

He was tired. It was easy to see he, too, was fighting exhaustion.

"You found me again!" she muttered incredulously. "*Twice* I lost you and *twice* you came directly . . ."

It was not complete unconsciousness that came to claim her in mid-sentence.

Through the pall of near insensibility came the impressions of being lifted into his arms. But this time, she sensed, he did not run. It was a slow, laborious pace that seemed to last for an eternity before it increased.

Then he was running again. She could detect the desperation in his motions.

Irola felt rough rocks scrape her near limp form and she knew he was climbing an elevation. Then he released her and she fell limply to a surface of bare rocks.

But it wasn't the impact that restored full consciousness. It was the inhuman shouts that erupted like violent claps of thunder. She forced herself to a sitting position and opened her eyes to look direct-

ly into the rocky surface of one of the towering cliffs, so near it seemed she could almost touch it.

Ralen's voice clashed hoarsely with the animal sounds behind her and she turned to see five Class Indeterminate things streaking toward him.

The scene of eruptive action was below. She sat on the flat surface of a rocky elevation, perhaps ten feet above the floor of the valley where the big Class C man stood in a half-crouch, tensed to meet the monstrosities that were charging on three sides.

There was another one of the six-arm things. And there was one with only two arms—but the appendages were gigantic, so much out of proportion to the body that it seemed the stumpy torso existed but to sustain the strength of the bulbous forearms and pincer hands. The crawling beast with the huge nose was there too, only now it bared twin rows of fangs that dripped saliva. Irola screamed in fear.

The crawling beast, displaying incredible speed in its charge, closed in first. Ralen sidestepped its lunge and brought his arm around and down in a blow aimed at the hideous face. It was then that she noticed the massive stone which he clutched.

It smashed into the chin and nose of the monster, crushing bone, pulping flesh, scattering broken

fangs.

The thing's anguished roars reverberated against distant cliffs until the valley itself seemed to shriek tormented protests. The beast scurried away, yelping, and lost itself in the sea of grass as Ralen turned to face the next swiftest brute.

Irola realized then how tired he was. He even grasped the few seconds before the next charge came to relax his tense muscles. For a moment he swayed and she thought he was going to collapse.

"Don't, Ralen!" she cried suddenly. "Don't fight!"

She couldn't let him sacrifice himself for her! It made no difference whether his motive was to save her only because the master had directed it, or because he was reacting to a basic instinct that prodded the pre-invasion men to protect their females.

"Don't fight them!" She rose to make herself better heard. "There are no bad masters! I only told you that to get you to come away with me! They are *all* good! When you listened to me you were being disloyal!"

There! She had done it! Would he give up the fight now? Would he turn with the other beasts and charge up the side of the elevation to tear her apart or to capture her?

He turned, even as the second

animal-like thing charged. But there was no anger on his face! He only smiled weakly and whirled to lock in battle with the hairy thing whose head seemed to be all mouth and whose knuckles dragged the ground as it loped forward.

The powerful arms raised and reached out for Ralen, exposing to view the rows of six-inch spurs that extended from elbows to wrists.

**C**ROUCHING suddenly as the thing grabbed for him, Ralen sprang high into the air between its extended arms and grasped its shoulders as he came back down. He planted both heels in the thing's midriff and jerked the huge torso forward.

The monster's body snapped up and over, its stumpy legs describing an arc over its head. Still clinging to it, Ralen swung around underneath, upside down, and released his grip as his back rolled onto the ground.

With terrific force, the beast was catapulted into the rising wall of the elevation on which Irola stood. Irregular rocks met the impact of its back and it slid down to the ground. The brute whimpered once in pain, then rose cautiously.

But Ralen had already turned to face the many-armed beast and the stumpy thing which pushed

ponderous pincers on the ground ahead of it as it closed in.

Terrified, Irola watched the hairy thing, recovered fully from the stunning impact, advance with both arms raised to drive its spurs into Ralen's back.

She screamed a warning, realizing even as she did that he could not turn from the new attackers. Instinctively, she grabbed for the nearest large rock that lay on the ledge.

Finding strength she knew she didn't possess, she lifted it, cast it out and down. It arched forward and crashed into the back of the hairy thing's head. The brute collapsed, part of its brain spilling from its skull.

Ralen locked with the six-armed one as the two huge claws hovered over him, snapping vehemently, waiting for their chance to find soft flesh on which to close with mangling, murderous force.

Two of the hands gripped Ralen's throat while a pair locked around his waist and another pair pommeled his body. Feebly, he disentangled his arms from the mass and wrenched one of the hands from his neck, forcing it up and away.

One of the waiting pincers snapped at the upraised arm, missed and drew back for another lunge.

The locked pair fell to the ground. Ralen worked a foot up

into the other's abdomen and kicked brutally, knocking the creature backward. Then he whirled in time to dodge a swing by the watching thing's pincers.

The beast that had brought up the rear of the charge—a thing with two heads—dived into the melee, reaching for Ralen's legs and trying to sink its teeth into flesh.

Meanwhile the claw came forward again. But the snapping vice of teeth missed him and came down on one of the necks of the two-headed monster. The head snapped off and rolled grotesquely on the ground as blood spurted from the stump at the thing's shoulder. It collapsed in a writhing mass.

But again the six-armed brute had Ralen locked in its grip.

Irola sank despairingly to the rocky surface. Ralen was limp now. He was apparently making no attempt to fight back. Then she saw his right hand move to the band of his loincloth. It came back up with *the poisonous needle case!*

He freed the other hand to open the container and withdraw the minuscule weapon.

Steel flashed sunlight as it sank into the fur. The brute went limp at once.

But there was no time for rest. The thing with the pincers re-

sumed its attack. Staggering, Ralen backed out of its reach and circled around it. He went faster than it could turn to face him.

At its rear, he dived in and stabbed with the needle again. Immediately the claws dropped to the ground as the small body which supported them fell.

Panting, Ralen turned to face her, too exhausted to hold up his arms, to keep his body erect and his eyes focused.

But even as he fell she looked up over him and saw the two forms rise from the concealing grass . . . *masters!*

Drawing their light-whip guns, they came forward cautiously, yet fearful of the superhuman Class C man who even now found the strength to rise once more and stand defiantly before them.

*Run, Irola! Down the other side—toward the cliff!*

Even in the final seconds before the light-whips would reach out to torture and kill him, he thought of her safety!

She started . . . *But he hadn't spoken! She hadn't heard the words!*

*Don't stand there like an imbecile! Go!*

It was not sound at all! The words had exploded in her head without entering through her ears!

Confounded, she screamed and

the landscape spun dizzily around her. She fought the faint long enough to stare bewilderingly and fearfully at Ralen, braced to receive the withering hell of light lances, and the masters who leveled their weapons and fired.

Then he was pitching to the ground. But suddenly the overlords stumbled backward, fear on their faces, and raised their weapons to fire into the air.

Numbly, she looked up.

At first it seemed the forms streaking down at the invaders were birds. But there were no wings. As they darted over her head, screeching down in their attack, she saw they were humans!

Small boxes of metal strapped to their chests seemed to glow with a light of their own. For some reason she associated the boxes with their ability to move through the air, for there was nothing else attached to them that might serve the same purpose.

Each held a weapon in his hand that made vicious noises as it was pointed at the invaders.

She tried to use her curiosity as a stimulant to fight unconsciousness. But she could not resist the faint born of fear and bewilderment. The last visual impression she received was that of two of the fliers dropping down to the side of the now unconscious Ralen.

**A** WAKE.

It was the unheard voice again! A scream welled in her throat.

*Do not cry out, Irola. There is no danger.*

If the quality it displayed could be called a tone, she would say the "voice" was soothing. Her initial fear melted and she opened her eyes.

"Where are we?" she asked, afraid to appear curious over his ability to put words directly into her head.

"We are beyond the cliff." He spoke naturally now. "There was a passage through it and this other valley lies on this side . . . And do not be afraid of my ability to speak with you telepathically."

"Tele . . . ?" She frowned. It was more than his ability to talk with unspoken words. He could see the thoughts in her mind! He had been able to see her thoughts all along. That was why she couldn't lose herself from him!

Irola raised herself on an elbow. She lay in bright morning sunlight on a bed near the large window of a stone dwelling place. And there were many buildings as far as she could see—some smaller, some much larger. But there was grass and even small trees growing on top of the roof of each one. And large nets of metal, spread from building to building, were



trellises for great vines, that hid the settlement from above.

Frowning, she looked into Ralen's face. He smiled reassuringly—no stupidity in the expression now . . . only intelligence, a great intelligence!

"Not that intelligent." He laughed. "Otherwise I wouldn't have forgotten I took the needle from you. I would have remembered soon enough to avoid some of the bruises from those things."

"You *knew* about the needle!"

"Of course. It was *my* idea that you bring the weapon."

"*Yours?*" she asked incredulously.

"It was all my idea—your escape, the decision to take a Class C male with you, your coming to the right pen . . . Even when you fled from me twice, I monitored and directed your thoughts so you would flee in the right direction—toward this settlement."

"You mean you *let* me flee?"

"Let you? — I *made* you run away the last time. I had to. You were too tired to go on. But we *had* to continue. We had to get here before they cut us off completely. When we were in the gorge, I couldn't insist that I carry you on—you would have known then that I was taking *you* somewhere. And I couldn't prompt you with unconscious suggestive telepathy—your mind was build-

ing up a fatigue-based resistance. So, all I could do was to scare you into running again by making noises like a Class Indeterminate thing."

"But . . ." She tried to rise; fell back weakly. "But I don't understand."

"You see, Irola, all members of Class C aren't big and dumb. They were, a few generations ago. But the invaders went a step too far in inducing mutations to insure stupidity in our stock. Their mistake was in mutating a new characteristic—telepathic ability, allied with the sex determining gene. It is passed on to about half of the males in the class.

"You can appreciate the advantage. Although the first telepaths were stupid, their unique ability soon offset their mental disadvantage. They were able to monitor the minds of their captors; to understand things with a logic borrowed from them, but tempered by the masters' hate for all humans. Available to them was all the knowledge of all the overlords . . . even the most informed."

"It hasn't been hard to fool them into continuing to conceive of all Class C men as being big but simple oafs. And acquiring more knowledge, more inventive ability isn't difficult either."

He patted the metal box on his

chest. "This is an example. With very simple materials, we perfected this compact dégravitator—a feat much beyond their ability . . . We are getting some remarkable weapons, too—much better than they have."

"You look into their minds all the time?"

"Practically. Even while we were escaping, I was monitoring them — until they threw in the Class Indeterminates. It takes a lot of concentration to influence those monsters' actions—especially when you're trying to keep yourself from getting hacked to pieces. That's why I was unaware of the two invaders hiding in the grass."

A TALL blond man with an indelible smile swept through the air toward the dwelling. He touched a knob on the box at his chest and landed in front, walked up to the window.

"Rested up?" he asked.

Ralen nodded.

"Glad to have you with us. Take a couple of days to get used to being outside of a pen. Then you'll assume your duties. You will be assigned to communications. You'll work with one of the inmates of your old pen in helping to indoctrinate him and plan for his escape. You'll also keep in contact with one of the other outposts. Practice range . . .

The outpost is fifteen hundred miles away."

"How did Starn make out?"

"Oh, he brought his party back already. They located and destroyed the four ships and all invaders and Class Indeterminates aboard. You said there were only four, didn't you?"

Ralen nodded.

The other turned to Irola. "I'm sure you'll like it here better than in the A pens, miss. And I hope you don't resent the way you were tricked. We only direct an occasional escape from each sector. We find it convenient to bring a normal woman each time. As long as the conquerors fail to keep count in the C pens, they'll never guess the dual nature of the escapes."

Then he was gone.

She turned toward Ralen. "But why, Ralen? Why didn't you tell me and save me all the horrible thoughts and . . ."

He reached under the bed and got one of the small boxes, began strapping it around her waist. "Our first rule, whenever we—uh, trick one of the A women into escaping with us, is not to let her know until we are safe at an outpost."

"If you had been captured before we reached here, they would have learned of the true nature of Class C—would have tor-

tured it out of you. If you knew nothing, you could tell nothing. Using telepathy at the last minute was permissible because I knew they had decided to send a party out to help us."

The sound of playing children erupted in the street a half block away. A dozen boys and girls chased each other in a boisterous game.

"But why me, Ralen?" Irola asked.

"Just a matter of choice." He smiled. "I've known you a long

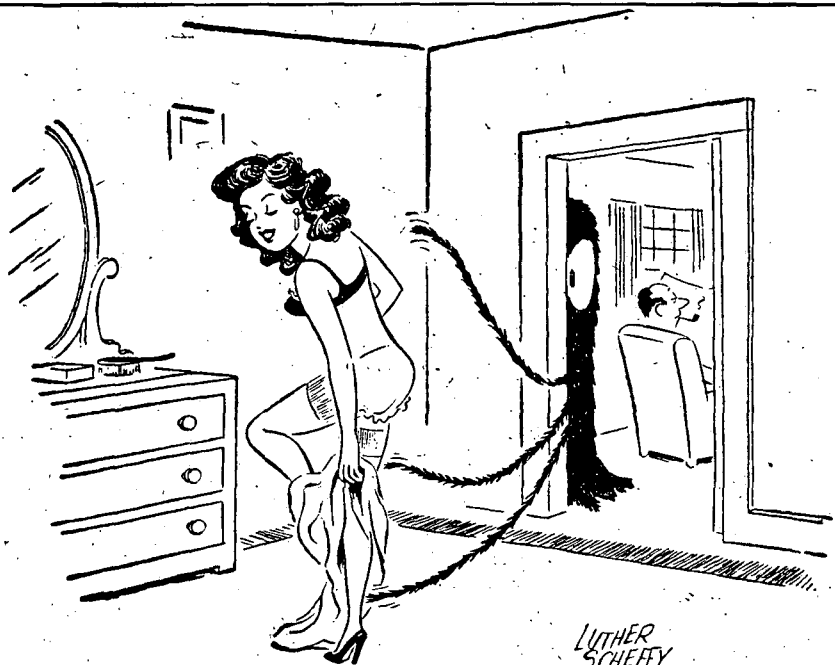
while, although you were never aware of it."

She looked down, embarrassed for a moment.

"Of course," he added quickly, "if you decide you don't—like me, there are others here and . . ."

Irola started to answer. But then she realized she didn't have to. He knew the answer even as soon as it formed in her mind.

She found his hand and held it as, together, they watched the children scamper by—free children.



"You STOP that, George! It tickles!"



# World Without Glamor

By

Milton Lesser

**Colonists on Talbor had little time for anything but work, which was bad for morale. So Earth sent a special ship — with a unique cargo.**

MARSDEN had filled a basin with well water and began to lather his hands and face with soap when Marie entered their cabin. He looked up and clucked his tongue in disapproval. "Lord," he said. "Look at yourself."

Marie scowled at him as she removed her bandanna and shook loose her short-cropped hair. "How do you expect me to look?" Her plain but pretty face was sweat-streaked. She wore a simple tunic which fell halfway down her thighs and almost matched her sturdy, sun-darkened legs in color, although sweat darkened the back of the garment and left rings of white under the armpits where it had evaporated.

"I know how I'd like you to look."

"Harry Marsden, just what do you mean by that?"

He had felt it for some time now, this smouldering resentment which had wedged its way between them after only two years of marriage. He couldn't talk to her without arguing, not after they had finished working for the day under the broiling sun and returned, bone-weary and stiff-muscled, to their cabin. The routine sickened him: he would come in first, splash cold water on his face, maybe scrub up some. Marie would follow after feeding their chickens (chickens here on Talbor, three dozen long light years from Earth!), strip off her tunic and try to scrub the grime from her body while he looked at her. And if it were warm she'd prepare their simple dinner half-naked, with no thought for modesty, until he knew every plane, every curve of her body and realized it was a body strong for work and not soft

for play, a body good for bearing children, a body which could work all day in the fields like a machine but which would never lose the grit from its pores.

"I didn't mean anything by it. Forget what I said, Marie." Marsden went to the clothing rack and took down his one good suit. He looked again at Marie, then closed his eyes and let a growing eagerness engulf him.

The ship from Earth was coming. Not the ship with more farm machinery, not the battered freighter which reached Talbor twice every year, but a tourist ship—the first one in Marsden's memory. There would be real Earth people on it, men and women. He thought deliciously of the women, wasp-waisted, high-breasted, lithe-legged and delicate. Marie would seem so plain against them, so tragically unfeminine — unless the pictures lied. Born on Talbor, Marsden had never seen a real woman of Earth.

**M**AYBE Marsden would feel more inclined to watch the patterned years drag by on Talbor, if he just once saw the women of Earth. He never told this to Marie, for she wouldn't understand.

"We'd better hurry," she said, "or we won't get to town till after the ship comes in."

Marsden nodded. "Like to see it land. Everyone will be there, I'll bet."

"I suppose so. It's a great deal of trouble, if you ask me."

"Trouble? Don't you want to see the people of Earth?" There it was again—Marsden felt an argument brewing. Marie spoke like an old woman, but she was only twenty-five. You couldn't blame her, though, and every time Marsden's thoughts took that tack he felt sorry for his wife. She had known nothing but Talbor all her life.

"They're people," said Marie. "Just folks." But she carefully removed the frilly dress which had hung near Marsden's suit on the rack and examined it critically.

"You're going to wear that?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. You haven't put it on since we got married, that's all."

"We can't scare the Earth people off with a lot of tunics and coveralls."

"Better get dressed," said Marsden, chuckling with grim amusement as Marie struggled with the unfamiliar garment. Marsden's own starched collar threatened to choke him, but the women of Earth would expect it.

"What's so funny, Harry?"

"There must be an easier way to climb into that thing. You look

so funny."

Marie's back was toward him. She took the dress off and threw it across the bed. "All right, I won't wear it. I won't wear anything. I'm not going."

"Now, Marie."

"Don't you 'now' me. I'll stay right here."

"I was joking," said Marsden, squirming uncomfortably inside his collar.

Marie flung the dress from bed to floor. "You can throw it out, for all I care. Or give it away."

"Thank you, I'll stay here."

"For crying out loud!" Marsden said in exasperation. "This is the biggest thing to hit Talbor in years. The Earth people are coming to visit us and you want to stay home."

"They probably will make fun of us."

"If we act like bumpkins they will. If we act—well, sophisticated, they won't."

"I'm not sophisticated." Marie sat down on the bed where her dress had been, drew her legs up, wrapped her arms around her knees. "Do I look sophisticated?"

"Put the dress on."

"I've never been off Talbor, never. We have one town, two hundred people on seventy or eighty farms. Is it my fault I wasn't born on Earth? Do you

think I would have married you if I had much choice?"

"Oh," said Marsden. "I see."

Marie stared at him and shrugged her bare shoulders. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, Harry. But you don't see. Talbor is all right for you because you're a man and you like to work like that. Don't you think I'd rather be small and attractive, instead of—"

"I think you're very attractive."

"That's a lie. I know how you and Charlie Adcock get together and look at those magazines with pictures of Earth women. Your tongues practically hang out."

"You've been spying on us."

"Really, Harry. Is looking at a magazine so secret I'm not permitted to watch? Why don't you treat me like an equal, anyway? But no, you think of the women of Earth. Well, let me tell you this, Harry Marsden: I'm stronger than them, I can work harder and I'll probably live longer and have more kids. What do you say to that?"

"I'm going into Talbor City. If you don't want to see them, I do."

"Watch that collar doesn't strangle you along the way."

"I'll get used to it," said Marsden, running a thick finger between stiff cloth and raw skin.

"Your face is getting red."

"That's all right."

"Red as a beet."



"Shut up."

"I'll bet you find it hard to breathe."

"Shut up!"

"Try and make me." Marie got off the bed, and when Marsden made a threatening gesture he thought she would run away. Instead, she leaped at him, got her strong fingers under the collar and yanked. The stiff collar burst open, the entire shirt-front ripped. Marie began to laugh.

Marsden went for her with murder in his eyes, but at that moment there came a roaring overhead like a dozen summer storms rolled into one, booming and crashing in the sky over their cabin. Talbor's sullen, orange sun had almost set, but bright light flashed in through the window, blinding them.

"I ought to beat you," said Marsden. But he opened the door and went outside into the strong, hot wind which had stirred over their rocky farmland and flapped the torn ends of his shirt against his chest.

The spaceship from Earth had arrived on Talbor.

**T**ALBOR City's one street, dry and dusty from the long day and hot sun, was ablaze with light. Marsden had never seen so many electric lights lit at once, not even on Saturday nights. Even as he

entered the city from the north, taking off his torn shirt and discarding it because no shirt seemed better than a damaged one, he heard the singing.

Charlie Adcock's deep, off-key voice rose stridently above the others, singing a song which was popular among the men of Talbor, but which the women hated.

*I want my arms around*

*A slim, small girl of Earth.*

*If she don't come to me*

*I think I'll have to die*

*For the slim, small girl of Earth.*

"Well, Harry! Thought you'd never get here."

"I had some things to do," Marsden lied.

"They already landed. They're here on Talbor. Here. They went to the hotel right away, of course. First time the hotel's been used since the last freighter crew decided to stay overnight. The mayor's declared a holiday. Nobody's working tomorrow."

"Me and Marie got to work," said Marsden, realizing he might be able to make peace with his wife after a day in the field.

"You ain't serious."

Marsden said, "How many of them came?"

"About twenty, half of them women, Harry. You should see the women, Harry. They wear real

frilly things, like you never even saw on Talbor. They're beautiful, friend. You *know* it. I mean beautiful all over. Hair fixed like it would take weeks to unravel. Belly's so thin you could get your fingers around them. Straight, slim legs, not a muscle on them. Such white skin you'd swear it was made out of milk. And the way they walked, Harry—so delicate they could have run across a field of fresh eggs without breaking a shell."

"I think I'll spend the night in town," said Marsden, forgetting all about Marie.

"Oh, didn't Marie come to town with you?"

Marsden shook his head without talking.

"Janie didn't, come neither. Say now, that's all right, Harry. That sure is all right. Leave the wife at home on a night like this. You know what? I think I'll take a room right there in the hotel and maybe even get to eat breakfast with the women of Earth. What do you say, Harry?"

"Suits me." Marsden's mind formed a brief image of Marie trying awkwardly to fit into the dress—to please me, he suddenly realized—and then the image faded. With Charlie Adcock he pushed through the crowd on the hotel steps.

MARSDEN felt breakfast, heavy mouthful by mouthful, forming an uncomfortable lump inside his chest. It was a long table big enough for thirty people, with the men and women of Earth chatting comfortably on all sides of it, their gay clothing making the dining room appear intolerably drab. Marsden had been on the verge of forgetting breakfast entirely, for when he reached the dining room he found all the seats at the table were taken except one between two delicate, wasp-waisted women of Earth. But Charlie Adcock, who was already seated, had waved him on toward the table with a broad grin, and it was either sit down or forever be a coward in Charlie's eyes.

"Hello," one of the women said while Marsden fidgeted and scooped forkfuls of bacon and eggs into his dry mouth.

Marsden blinked. She was talking to him.

"Good morning, Miss."

"So you're a native of Talbor. Tell me, how do you stand it?"

"Born here, I guess." Marsden found it difficult to talk and eat at the same time. His face grew uncomfortably warm, his tongue seemed to swell until he wanted to spit it out.

"I'm Alice Cooper, Mr.—"

Mister. No one had ever call-

ed him Mister. "Better call me Harry, Miss. Just Harry."

"I want you to tell me all about your primitive planet, Harry. Everything. I've got a camera and I'm going to take pictures and write notes about them so when I get back to Earth I can tell everyone about this quaint planet."

Marsden wished he had a shirt, for it wasn't right for Alice Cooper to have to see his sun-scorched, hair-matted chest while she ate. But Marsden felt somewhat better when he let his eyes rove to the men of Earth. They sat tall and straight in clothing fancier than it was right for a man to wear, but they were thin, pale and—well, a little washed-out looking.

"Why don't you show me around?" Alice Cooper suddenly asked him. "You can't see a place unless a native shows it to you, and we have to leave tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Of course, Harry. We have lots of planets to visit and we can't spend more than a day on an out-of-the-way mote like Talbor."

"Well, now, there are plenty of interesting things on Talbor."

"Oh, I know. I know. Rustic cabins, rocky fields, stolid farmers who work the soil all day and fall into bed exhausted at night. It's all very thrilling."

"We have some mighty nice

scenery," Marsden told her. "Madison falls are two-hundred feet high, and we've got some mountains that—"

"Certainly, Harry. But I can see that sort of thing just anywhere. I want you to show me your farm, your fields. How you people of Talbor can get by on this rocky, God-forsaken place I'll never know. Why your parents came here I could never figure out."

He stood up awkwardly. "I guess—well . . ."

Alice Cooper rose to her feet in a liquid motion beautiful to behold. The top of her head came up to his shoulders and she reached out with one small, dainty hand and touched his upper arm.

"My, but you have big muscles."

Marsden smiled.

"You need them in this grim, dreary place, of course. You probably wish you didn't. You probably would rather be thin and wear glasses maybe and spend most of your time in an air-cooled office and do things—like that."

"I don't know. A man would grow bored working in an office."

"See?" Alice Cooper cried. "See? I just knew I'd love Talbor. You're so primitive. Why, you're practically—Cro-Magnon. Come on outside, Harry. I want to take your picture."

She took his big hand and led

him to the door. Marsden looked back uncomfortably and saw Charlie Adcock off in a corner with two of the women of Earth, talking avidly. Strangely, he thought Charlie was scowling about something.

Talbor's strong orange sunlight made him squint while Alice Cooper said: "Tremendous place for a camera enthusiast. I hear it never rains around here. Surprising this place isn't a desert, don't you think?"

"It rains when it has to."

"Here: Stand over here. Yes, facing the sun. Can you do something to show you're almost—almost—ancestral?"

"I don't understand, Miss."

"Goodness, I mean your muscles. Flex them. Use them to do something like lifting a heavy object. Break something if you want to. I'm sure those muscles are good for something besides weeding your fields or pulling a plow."

Marsden began to feel foolish but obliged her with a handstand. He lost his balance, though; before she could take the picture and tumbled flat on his back in the dusty street, landing so hard he saw stars.

A COUPLE of men who had been watching from the hotel

steps snickered. "I didn't know Marsden was an acrobat."

"His old lady claims she's going to sell him to the interstellar circus when it comes around."

"What do you say we give him a hand?"

Marsden sat up, rubbed his head. One of the men came over and offered his arm. Cat-quick, Marsden leaped to his feet and thrust the man away from him so hard that he stumbled back, crashed against the bottom steps and fell. Something clicked, and Alice Cooper squealed excitedly:

"I got it! That was perfect, Harry. Thank you ever so much. I caught it just after you started to shove him and now when my friends see this they'll know Talbor is a primitive place. Are there many murders here?"

"I've never heard of one," said Harry, dusting his trousers off. "We're too busy for crime, I guess."

"How terribly dull. Statistics show that more advanced societies are prone to higher crime rates, particularly crimes of passion, since everyone is high strung and capable of flying off the handle as the expression goes. Did you ever think of committing a crime of passion, Harry?"

She stood there, small and frail in the sunlight, delicately, lushly

curved. She wet her lips and they were very red in the sunlight and against her pale white face.

"No," said Marsden thickly. "I'd better take you back inside to your friends, maybe."

"Why, don't be ridiculous. See, they're all outside anyway."

Marsden's gaze took in Talbor City's one street. The crowds had thinned considerably; people moved off toward the outskirts and the farmlands in twos and threes, the Earth people scattered among them and going to see Talbor with them. Marsden felt lost and alone and a little frightened, for he knew he would go off into the country-side with Alice Cooper in another moment, and he hardly trusted himself.

"They're not my friends, Harry. We're traveling together, but we hardly know each other. You don't just make friends with anyone, it isn't civilized. People are always out to get you, to trick you, to make fun of you and take advantage of you. Oh, you've got to be careful, I always say. Shall we see Talbor now?"

"I should go home and start plowing."

"I'm leaving tonight, Harry." Her hand slipped under his arm and nestled there. His bare arm tingled.

"What would you like to see?"

he asked uncomfortably.

"**E**VERYONE has a different crop to grow," Marsden explained later. "On my farm it's barley."

"Just barley? It must be rather dull, growing barley all year long."

"We have some cattle and chickens, too. But I spend most of my time tending the irrigation ditches. Summertime it's a sunrise to sunset job."

"You poor man. You—" Suddenly Ailce Cooper's eyes grew big. She gasped and clutched at Marsden's arm. "Harry, over there! Ooo, Harry!"

Marsden turned, saw a small dog bounding across the field playfully, turning and twisting and barking at its own shadow.

"It's nothing to be afraid of."

"An animal, nothing to be afraid of? Harry, it's coming this way."

The dog had seen them. Yelping, its tail wagging, it came right up to them, nuzzling against Marsden's leg while he crouched and petted it.

"Better take me back to town, Harry."

"There boy, there boy." Marsden scratched the dog's ear, cuffed it gingerly with his big hand, turned it around, thumped its rear and watched it leap away across

the rocky meadow. "Don't worry, Miss. A little dog like that never hurt anyone."

"I feel faint, Harry. I expected wilderness and that's what I came to see—but animals running around loose? That's too much."

"Dogs and men get along fine on Talbor."

"On Earth dogs are in the zoo where they belong." Alice Cooper patted her brow daintily with a handkerchief. "I do wish we could get out of this sun."

A person not liking dogs. It wasn't right, Marsden thought. And hating the sun and the soil out of which crops grew and . . . Well, he couldn't blame Alice Cooper. Everything was so strange and new to her and she was just plain upset.

"I could take you to my cabin," he told her. "It's nearby."

Alice Cooper nodded, took one step forward, turned her ankle and tripped. She fell heavily, catching one of her high heels against the hem of her frilly dress. There was a ripping sound and a long tear appeared in the bottom of the dress.

"It's ruined," said Alice Cooper in despair.

"My wife can fix it."

"Your what?"

"My wife."

"Don't tell me you get married here on Talbor? I knew this was

a primitive society, really primitive—but not to that extent. You get married and—and stay with one partner for life, for your whole life? Really?"

"That's right," said Marsden. "Don't you?"

"Well—you wouldn't understand, Harry. You just wouldn't understand. Here, help me up."

He got her to her feet, but her twisted ankle wouldn't support her. "You'd better carry me."

Marsden nodded, got one hand under her arms from behind, the other in back of her thighs. Cradling her thus, he began to walk. She weighed almost nothing; she was incredibly feather-light, but pleasant to the touch and smelling, this close, of some delightful perfume.

"You're strong," she said.

Gulping audibly, Marsden averted his face from hers, only inches away.

WHEN he pushed the cabin door open with one foot, Marie started to smile at him from inside. The smile faded. "Harry. Oh. Is she—hurt or something?"

"Aren't you the bright one," Alice Cooper said. "I'm too lazy to walk."

"Be quiet, Marie," Marsden said. "What's the matter with

you?"

"Did I say something wrong? I'm sorry."

"It's to be expected," Alice Cooper declared.

"You were gone all night, Harry."

"He can take care of himself, I'm sure," Alice Cooper said.

Harry frowned. "I told you to keep quiet, Marie."

"No, let her talk, Harry. Of course he was gone all night. What's the matter, don't you think he can take care of himself?"

"My Harry is quite a capable man, thank you."

"Marie!"

"Your Harry. That's right, you are fettered to one another all your lives. It's fantastic. Will you be a good girl and bring me something to eat?"

Marie nodded and soon returned with two plates of stew. It was Marsden's favorite food and Marie had probably prepared it as a peace offering, but two plates meant one for him and one for Alice Cooper and Marie would go hungry.

"I'm not in the mood to eat," said Harry while his stomach grumbled.

"You? Not in the mood to eat Talborean stew? I'd like to see the day. Go ahead, I'm not hun-

gry."

"You're both crazy," Alice Cooper said. "Pretending you're not hungry so the other can eat. No wonder this is such a backward place. If someone said that to me I'd gobble the food up quick before he could change his mind. On Earth, naturally, no one would ever say it."

"I'll get some cold cloths for your leg," Marsden said to break the awkward silence which followed.

"Cloths, nothing." Alice Cooper stood up. "Did you think I really hurt myself? I only wanted you to carry me and take me here, but if this hefty wife of yours is here, I guess you might as well take me back to town."

"If I wasn't a lady . . ." began Marie.

"You? That's very good, my dear. A lady wrestler, you mean. Well, Harry, what are you waiting for? Take me back to Talbor City, please."

Marsden looked at his wife's plain, unpainted but still pretty face, at the way days under the bright sun had added glowing highlights to her red-brown hair and Alice Cooper seemed like a wilted flower by comparison. Marsden thought of the long walk with her back to Talbor City and wished it were over already.

THE spaceship blasted off with a terrible clamor. The people of Earth, the men and women, were gone. They had been here on Talbor only a few hours but to Marsden it seemed much longer. He was infinitely glad they could only stay one day.

He met Charlie Adcock near the steps of the hotel. Charlie carried his shirt under one arm and was scowling. "You know," he said, "songs and pictures are funny things. They sure can fool a guy sometimes."

"Yeah," said Marsden.

"I don't know, Harry. I'm still glad they came. We were busting to see something different, either to have them come here, or maybe to take off and forget all about Talbor."

"What do you mean, forget about Talbor? Talbor's a pretty nice place. You work all day, sure, but it's good, clean work and you know your friends are working too, and then Saturday night you can go into town hooting and hollering and no one cares."

"Yeah, Harry. Sure. That's what I mean. You know what? Those women of Earth are kind of skinny."

"It was an accident they came when they did," said Marsden. "A lucky accident. I like Talbor now. I wouldn't change places with any-

one."

"It's still nice looking at pictures and singing songs, I guess, if we can forget about the real women of Earth."

"A lucky accident," said Marsden again. "Just when we got all starry-eyed about things that didn't matter, they came and showed us what we really had."

"Well, see you."

Later, after Marsden returned to his cabin, Marie said:

"I'll wear that dress Saturday nights if you want."

"Fine," said Marsden. "But only Saturday nights. It's silly the rest of the time."

He took Marie in his arms.

ALICE Cooper removed the tight corset with a sigh of relief. "The first thing I'm going to do when we get back home is go out to the beach somewhere and get sunburned. Swim and ride horseback, too," she told one of her companions. "I feel all—all scrunched up."

"Little wonder, Alice. Women weren't made to wear these tight things and get all constricted."

"What a job," said Alice. "Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it. We still have three more planets to visit on this trip."

"It's worth it. Sociology Central figures it out just right. When



the folks on one of the out planets get a little disgruntled with what they've got, we're sent. They've built up a mighty splendid picture of Earth and Earth people."

"I know it. So we come along and do everything we can to make Earth look like the worst sink hole in the universe. By the time we leave, the two ideas—their own glorified impression of Earth and our warped play-acting — kind of

merge. They realize they have a pretty good thing on their own home planet."

"That's the way it should be, but I *still* like Earth."

"Me' too," Alice smiled. "One of these days, though, my husband is going to make me give up my career and raise a whole crew of children. You know something? I think I'd like that fine."

THE END



## Atomic Motor



THE dream of rocketeers is of course the atomic rocket engine. Unfortunately, unless there is some unlikely, radical discovery, it appears as if the atomic rocket engine will have severe limitations. Such an engine would work roughly like this: an atomic pile of fissionable materials would generate a great deal of heat. This heat would expand or vaporize gases which in turn would be fed through the nozzles of a rocket to exert conventional thrust.

This neat arrangement might seem the answer to the rocketeer's prayer at first, but there are problems. For example, no matter how hot the atomic pile gets (it dare not be hot enough to melt) transferring this heat to a gas, liquid or solid rapidly enough for useful high-powered thrust appears unlikely. In other words heat-exchanging seems to be the limita-

tion of the motor.

So far as anyone can look into the future, the atomic powered space ship will be able to exert only very low thrusts. As a result atomic engines will be suitable (for a long time at least) only for long interplanetary journeys. Take-offs and landing on planets will still have to be done with chemical rocket motors. A lesser problem than the thrust is of course the dangerous spray of radio-actives.

Regardless of the low thrust of a hypothetical atomic engine, it can still be quite useful. Low thrusts exerted over long periods of time can build up respectable speeds. Certainly the atomic engine has a future in space travel if for this purpose alone.

The great hope naturally is that some as yet unthought of heat exchanger will be developed. Theoretically such a heat exchanger

would be able to transfer large amounts of heat generated from atomic fission to large quantities of materials (gases, etc.). Present physical laws definitely limit this flow to rather small rates. If some entirely new method of heat transfer were discovered or perhaps some method of causing the

gases to fission themselves—that would be another matter! Then the atomic engine would really be the rocket motor of the future. Until that event though, it looks as if space travel is going to be done with the aid of chemical rocket motors—and not much else . . .

\* \* \*



"How's the death ray developing, Jamison?"





# THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET

*By*

*Philip K. Dick*

**It seemed like an ordinary request—the woman wanted to buy a ticket to Earth. And yet the Captain knew that no such world existed! . . .**

**“S**HE just stands there,” Norton said nervously. “What does she want?”  
“Captain, you have to talk to her.” “She wants a ticket. She’s stone deaf. She just stands there staring and she won’t go away. If

gives me the creeps."

Captain Andrews got slowly to his feet. "Okay. I'll talk to her. Send her in."

"Thanks." To the corridor Norton said, "The Captain will talk to you. Come ahead."

There was motion outside the control room. A flash of metal. Captain Andrews pushed his desk scanner back and stood waiting.

"In here." Norton backed into the control room. "This way. Right in here."

Behind Norton came a withered little old woman. Beside her moved a gleaming robant, a towering robot servant, supporting her with its arm. The robant and the tiny old woman entered the control room slowly.

"Here's her papers." Norton slid a folio onto the chart desk, his voice awed. "She's three hundred and fifty years old. One of the oldest sustained. From Riga II."

Andrews leafed slowly through the folio. In front of the desk the little woman stood silently, staring straight ahead. Her faded eyes were pale blue. Like ancient china.

"Irma Vincent Gordon," Andrews murmured. He glanced up. "Is that right?"

The old woman did not answer.

"She is totally deaf, sir," the robant said.

Andrews grunted and return-

ed to the folio. Irma Gordon was one of the original settlers of the Riga system. Origin unknown. Probably born out in space—in one of the old sub-C ships. A strange feeling drifted through him. The little old creature. The centuries she had seen! The changes.

"She wants to travel?" he asked the robant.

"Yes sir. She has come from her home to purchase a ticket."

"Can she stand space travel?"

"She came from Riga, here to Fomalhaut IX."

"Where does she want to go?"

"To Earth, sir," the robant said.

"Earth!" Andrews' jaw dropped. He swore nervously. "What do you mean?"

"She wishes to travel to Earth, sir."

"You see?" Norton muttered. "Completely crazy."

Gripping his desk tightly, Andrews addressed the old woman. "Madam, we can't sell you a ticket to Earth."

"She can't hear you, sir," the robant said.

Andrews found a piece of paper. He wrote in big letters:

CAN'T SELL YOU A TICKET  
TO EARTH

HE held it up. The old woman's eyes moved as she studied the words. Her lips twitched. "Why

not?" she said at last. Her voice was faint and dry. Like rustling weeds.

Andrews scratched an answer.

NO SUCH PLACE

He added grimly:

MYTH—LEGEND — NEVER EXISTED

The old woman's faded eyes left the words. She gazed directly at Andrews, her face expressionless. Andrews became uneasy. Beside him, Norton sweated nervously.

"Jeez," Norton muttered. "Get her out of here. She'll put the hex on us."

Andrews addressed the robant. "Can't you make her understand. There is no such place as Earth. It's been proved a thousand times. No such primordial planet existed. All scientists agree human life arose simultaneously throughout the—"

"It is her wish to travel to Earth," the robant said patiently. "She is three hundred and fifty years old and they have ceased giving her sustentation treatments. She wishes to visit Earth before she dies."

"But it's a myth!" Andrews exploded. He opened and closed his mouth, but no words came.

"How much?" the old woman said. "How much?"

"I can't do it!" Andrews shouted. "There isn't—"

"We have a kilo positives," the

robant said.

Andrews became suddenly quiet. "A thousand positives." He blanched in amazement. His jaws clamped shut, the color draining from his face.

"How much?" the old woman repeated. "How much?"

"Will that be sufficient?" the robant asked.

For a moment Andrews swallowed silently. Abruptly he found his voice. "Sure," he said. "Why not?"

"Captain!" Norton protested. "Have you gone nuts. You know there's no such place as Earth! How the hell can we—"

"Sure, we'll take her." Andrews buttoned his tunic slowly, hands shaking. "We'll take her anywhere she wants to go. Tell her that. For a thousand positives we'll be glad to take her to Earth. Okay?"

"Of course," the robant said. "She has saved many decades for this. She will give you the kilo positives at once. She has them with her."

"LOOK," Norton said. "You can get twenty years for this. They'll take your articles and your card and they'll—"

"Shut up." Andrews spun the dial of the intersystem vidsender. Under them the jets throbbed and roared. The lumbering transport

had reached deep space. "I want the main information library at Centaurus II," he said into the speaker.

"Even for a thousand positives you can't do it. Nobody can do it. They tried to find Earth for generations. Directorate ships tracked down every moth-eaten planet in the whole—"

The vidsender clicked. "Centaurus II."

"Information library."

Norton caught Andrews' arm. "Please, Captain. Even for *two* kilo positives—"

"I want the following information," Andrews said into the vidspeaker. "All facts known concerning the planet Earth. Legendary birthplace of the human race."

"No facts are known," the detached voice of the library monitor came. "The subject is classified as metaparticular."

"What unverified but widely circulated reports have survived?"

"Most legends concerning Earth were lost during the Centauran-Rigan conflict of 4-B33a. What survived is fragmentary. Earth is variously described as a large ringed planet with three moons, as a small, dense planet with a single moon, as the first planet of a ten-planet system located around a dwarf white—"

"What's the most prevalent le-

gend?"

"The Morrison Report of 5-G211 analyzed the total ethnic and subliminal accounts of the legendary Earth. The final summation noted that Earth is generally considered to be a small third planet of a nine planet system, with a single moon. Other than that, no agreement of legends could be constructed."

"I see. A third planet of a nine planet system. With a single moon." Andrews broke the circuit and the screen faded.

"So?" Norton said.

Andrews got quickly to his feet. "She probably knows every legend about it." He pointed down—at the passenger quarters below. "I want to get the accounts straight."

"Why? What are you going to do?"

Andrews flipped open the master star chart. He ran his fingers down the index and released the scanner. In a moment it turned up a card.

He grabbed the chart and fed it into the robant pilot. "The Emphor System," he murmured thoughtfully.

"Emphor? We're going there?"

"According to the chart, there are ninety systems that show a third planet of nine with a single moon. Of the ninety, Emphor is the closest. We're heading there now."

"I don't get it," Norton protest-

ed. "Emphor is a routine trading system. Emphor III isn't even a Class D check point."

Captain Andrews grinned tightly. "Emphor III has a single moon, and it's the third of nine planets. That's all we want. Does anybody know any more about Earth?" He glanced downward. "Does *she* know any more about Earth?"

"I see," Norton said slowly. "I'm beginning to get the picture."

EMPHOR III turned silently below them. A dull red globe, suspended among sickly clouds, its baked and corroded surface lapped by the congealed remains of ancient seas. Cracked, eroded cliffs jutted starkly up. The flat plains had been dug and stripped bare. Great gouged pits pocked the surface, endless gaping sores.

Norton's face twisted in revulsion. "Look at it. Is anything alive down there?"

Captain Andrews frowned. "I didn't realize it was so gutted." He crossed abruptly to the robant pilot. "There's supposed to be an auto-grapple someplace down there. I'll try to pick it up."

"A grapple? You mean that waste is inhabited?"

"A few Emphorites. Degenerate trading colony of some sort." Andrews consulted the card. "Com-

mercial ships come here occasionally. Contact with this region has been vague, since the Centauran-Rigan War."

The passage rang with a sudden sound. The gleaming robant and Mrs. Gordon emerged through the doorway, into the control room. The old woman's face was alive with excitement. "Captain! Is that—is that Earth down there?"

Andrews nodded. "Yes."

The robant led Mrs. Gordon over to the big viewscreen. The old woman's face twitched, ripples of emotion stirring her withered features. "I can hardly believe that's really Earth. It seems impossible." Norton glanced sharply at Captain Andrews.

"It's Earth," Andrews stated, not meeting Norton's glance. "The moon should be around, soon."

The old woman did not speak. She had turned her back.

Andrews contacted the auto-grapple and hooked the robant pilot on. The transport shuddered and then began to drop, as the beam from Emphor caught it and took over.

"We're landing," Andrews said to the old woman, touching her on the shoulder.

"She can't hear you, sir," the robant said.

Andrews grunted. "Well, she can see."

Below them the pitted, ruined surface of Emphor III was rising



rapidly. The ship entered the cloud belt and emerged, coasting over a barren plain that stretched as far as the eye could see.

"What happened down there?" Norton said to Andrews. "The war?"

"War. Mining. And it's old. The pits are probably bomb craters. Some of the long trenches may be scoop gouges. Looks like they really exhausted this place."

A crooked row of broken mountain peaks shot past under them. They were nearing the remains of an ocean. Dark, unhealthy water lapped below, a vast sea, crusted with salt and waste, its edges disappearing into banks of piled debris.

"Why is it that way?" Mrs. Gordon said suddenly. Doubt crossed her features. "Why?"

"What do you mean?" Andrews said.

"I don't understand." She stared uncertainly down at the surface below. "It isn't supposed to be this way. Earth is green. Green and alive. Blue water and . . ." Her voice trailed off uneasily. "Why?"

Andrews grabbed some paper and wrote:

COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS EXHAUSTED SURFACE

Mrs. Gordon studied his words, her lips twitching. A spasm moved

through her, shaking the thin, dried-out body. "Exhausted . . ." Her voice rose in shrill dismay. "It's not supposed to be this way! I don't want it this way!"

The robot took her arm. "She had better rest. I'll return her to her quarters. Please notify us when the landing has been made."

"Sure." Andrews nodded awkwardly as the robot led the old woman from the viewscreen. She clung to the guide rail, face distorted with fear and bewilderment.

"Something's wrong!" she wailed. "Why is it this way? Why . . ."

The robot led her from the control room. The closing of the hydraulic safety doors cut off her thin cry abruptly.

Andrews relaxed, his body sagging. "God." He lit a cigarette shakily. "What a racket she makes."

"We're almost down." Norton said frigidly.

COLD wind lashed at them as they stepped out cautiously. The air smelled bad — sour and acrid. Like rotted eggs. The wind brought salt and sand blowing up against their faces.

A few miles off the thick sea lay. They could hear it swishing faintly, gummily. A few birds passed silently overhead, great wings flapping soundlessly.

"Depressing damn place," An-

drews muttered.

"Yeah. I wonder what the old lady's thinking."

Down the descent ramp came the glittering robant, helping the little old woman. She moved hesitantly, unsteadily, gripping the robant's metal arm. The cold wind whipped around her frail body. For a moment she tottered—and then came on, leaving the ramp and gaining the uneven ground.

Norton shook his head. "She looks bad. This air. And the wind."

"I know." Andrews moved back toward Mrs. Gordon and the robant. "How is she?" he asked.

"She is not well, sir," the robant answered.

"Captain," the old woman whispered.

"What is it?"

"You must tell me the truth. Is this—is this really Earth?"

She watched his lips closely. "You swear it is? You *swear*?" Her voice rose in shrill terror.

"It's Earth!" Andrews snapped irritably. "I told you before. Of course it's Earth."

"It doesn't look like Earth." Mrs. Gordon clung to his answer, panic-stricken. "It doesn't look like Earth, Captain. Is it really Earth?"

"Yes!"

Her gaze wandered toward the ocean. A strange look flickered across her tired face, igniting her

faded eyes with sudden hunger. "Is that water? I want to see."

Andrews turned to Norton. "Get the launch out. Drive her where she wants."

Norton pulled back angrily. "Me?"

"That's an order."

"Okay." Norton returned reluctantly to the ship. Andrews lit a cigarette moodily and waited. Presently the launch slid out of the ship, coasting across the ash toward them.

"You can show her anything she wants," Andrews said to the robant. "Norton will drive you."

"Thank you, sir," the robant said. "She will be grateful. She has wanted all her life to stand on Earth. She remembers her grandfather telling her about it. She believes that he came from Earth, a long time ago. She is very old. She is the last living member of her family."

"But Earth is just a—" Andrews caught himself. "I mean —"

"Yes sir. But she is very old. And she has waited many years." The robant turned to the old woman and led her gently toward the launch. Andrews stared after them sullenly, rubbing his jaw and frowning.

"Okay," Norton's voice came from the launch. He slid the hatch open and the robant led the old

woman carefully inside. The hatch closed after them.

A moment later the launch shot away across the salt flat, toward the ugly, lapping ocean.

NORTON and Captain Andrews paced restlessly along the shore. The sky was darkening. Sheets of salt blew against them. The mud flats stank in the gathering gloom of night. Dimly, off in the distance, a line of hills faded into the silence and vapors.

"Go on," Andrews said. "What then?"

"That's all. She got out of the launch. She and the robant. I stayed inside. They stood looking across the ocean. After awhile, the old woman sent the robant back to the launch."

"Why?"

"I don't know. She wanted to be alone, I suppose. She stood for a time by herself. On the shore. Looking over the water. The wind rising. All at once she just sort of settled down. She sank down in a heap, into the salt ash."

"Then what?"

"While I was pulling myself together, the robant leaped out and ran to her. It picked her up. It stood for a second and then it started for the water. I leaped out of the launch, yelling. It stepped into the water and disappeared. Sank down in the mud and filth.

Vanished." Norton shuddered. "With her body."

Andrews tossed his cigarette savagely away. The cigarette rolled off, glowing behind them. "Anything more?"

"Nothing. It all happened in a second. She was standing there, looking over the water. Suddenly she quivered—like a dead branch. Then she just sort of dwindled away. And the robant was out of the launch and into the water with her before I could figure out what was happening."

The sky was almost dark. Huge clouds drifted across the faint stars. Clouds of unhealthy night vapors and particles of waste. A flock of immense birds crossed the horizon, flying silently.

Against the broken hills the moon was rising. A diseased, barren globe, tinted faintly yellow. Like old parchment.

"Let's get back in the ship," Andrews said. "I don't like this place."

"I can't figure out why it happened. The old woman." Norton shook his head.

"The wind. Radio-active toxins. I checked with Centaurus II. The War devastated this whole system. Left the planet a lethal wreck."

"Then we won't—"

"No. We won't have to answer for it." They continued for a time in silence. "We won't have

to explain. It's evident enough. Anybody coming here, especially an old person—"

"Only nobody would come here," Norton said bitterly. "Especially an old person."

Andrews didn't answer. He paced along, head down, hands in pockets. Norton followed silently behind. Above them, the single moon grew brighter as it escaped the mists and entered a patch of clear sky.

"By the way," Norton said, his voice cold and distant behind Andrews. "This is the last trip I'll be making with you. While I was in the ship I filed a formal request for new papers."

"Oh?"

"Thought I'd let you know. And my share of the kilo positives. You can keep it."

Andrews flushed and increased his pace, leaving Norton behind. The old woman's death had shaken him. He lit another cigarette and then threw it away.

Damn it—the fault wasn't *his*. She had been old. Three hundred and fifty years. Senile and deaf. A faded leaf, carried off by the wind. By the poisonous wind that lashed and twisted endlessly across the ruined face of the planet.

The ruined face. Salt ash and debris. The broken line of crumbling hills. And the silence. The

eternal silence. Nothing but the wind and the lapping of the thick stagnant water. And the dark birds overhead.

Something glinted. Something at his feet, in the salt ash. Reflecting the sickly pallor of the moon.

Andrews bent down and groped in the darkness. His fingers closed over something hard. He picked the small disc up and examined it.

"Strange," he said.

**I**T wasn't until they were out in deep space, roaring back toward Fomalhaut, that he remembered the disc.

He slid away from the control panel, searching his pockets for it.

The disc was worn and thin. And terribly old. Andrews rubbed it and spat on it until it was clean enough to make out. A faint impression—nothing more. He turned it over. A token? Washer? Coin?

On the back were a few meaningless letters. Some ancient, forgotten script. He held the disc to the light until he made the letters out.

### E PLURIBUS UNUM

He shrugged, tossed the ancient bit of metal into a waste disposal unit beside him, and turned his attention to the star charts, and home . . .

THE END

# HOLD ONTO YOUR BODY!

By

Richard O. Lewis

**People do strange things—an example,  
committing suicide for no apparent reason.  
Unless it's time for a change of identity!**

“FIDWELL,” I said, “why don’t you go lose yourself!”

He stared at me uncomprehendingly for a full three seconds. Then a glimmer of understanding leaped into his beady little eyes and he got up from the chair before my desk and started happily toward the outer door of the office.

“Okay, Mr. Nelson,” he said over a thin shoulder. “Just whatever you say.”

“Better still,” I amended, tapping the glass top of my desk with manicured nails, “go shoot yourself.”

He nodded blithely. “Just as you say, T. J. Just as you say.” He always called me T. J. when he felt that I was giving him a measure of attention.

“Wait,” I said, as he reached

the door. “Do you by any chance own a gun?”

He turned, a frown spreading between his mousy brows. “No,” he said, slowly, “I don’t.” Then he brightened. “But I could purchase one!”

“Fine,” I said, tossing him a bill. “Buy a couple bullets for it, too.”

He caught the money, smiled, nodded, and left—closing the door softly and respectfully behind him.

Humming a merry little tune, I turned to the papers upon my desk. The partnership contract between James Fidwell and T. J. Nelson. *If one of the partners should die from any cause, the other partner would become sole owner of the Remey Company . . .*

They seemed quite in order. I shuffled them into a neat pile and



cut an intricate little dance step on my way to the files with them. The partnership was soon to reach a happy culmination.

Suicide has it all over murder, you know. No silly questions from the police. No mess to clean up. No body to get rid of. (The relatives usually take care of all that.) No bother at all, really.

I skipped back to the desk, flipped up the telephone, and be-

gan poking a finger into the little holes in the dial.

"Mr. Pasquamine?" I chimed, after hearing the faint click at the other end of the wire.

"Yes."

"This is T. J., I said, chummily: "You still own that block of floating stock in the Remy Company, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Fine! Fine!" I complimented.

"Bring it over to my office as soon as possible. And, by the way," I added, casually, "have it transferred to my name, you know."

"Yes."

He was in my office in less than an hour, his fat hulk sweating and panting in the chair before my desk, the heavy lids drooping over his black eyes. The stocks were piled neatly before me. I thumbed through them. They seemed to be quite in order. I skipped across the room to the files with them.

"Pasquamine," I said, returning to my desk and handing him a cheap cigar, "do you by chance own a gun?"

He shook his fat head. "No."

"Do you have at home, perchance, a rope?" I glanced at his obese body. "A good stout one?"

"No."

"A knife, perhaps? A good sharp one?"

His oily face beamed quickly. "Ah, Mr. Nelson! That I have! Sharp for the salami!" He kissed his thick fingers and made a flipping motion into the air with them. "Sharp for the good big salami!"

"Excellent!" I nodded quick approbation. "Go home and cut your throat with it."

HE pushed his hulk up from the chair and walked toward the door.

"And don't bother about coming back to the office afterwards," I admonished.

He paused, hand on the knob, and turned. Then his round face lighted up. "Ah, Mr. Nelson!" he chuckled. "You make with the joke!"

"Sure." I smiled. "And now you go home and make with the knife."

That was the last time I saw Pasquamine. Except at the funeral, of course. He made a lovely corpse—considering everything.

It was the day following the funeral when there came a gentle tapping at my office door.

"Come in," I said, tossing the half-finished bottle of gin back into the lower drawer.

They didn't bother about opening the door; they just crawled under it. A moment later, they had slithered across the floor, had wiggled their way up to the top on my desk, and had flattened out upon its polished surface in complete pseudopod relaxation. Gyf and Gyl. My two very good friends.

"Sorry, boys," I said, after we had exchanged the usual amenities, "that I had to get rid of your symbiotics in such a messy fashion. But business is business, you know; and I felt that the time was right...."

Gyf shrugged gelatinously. "I

was getting tired of occupying Fidwell, anyway," he vibrated. "Regular old pussyfoot. Never had no fun."

Gyl burped resoundingly in the middle. "I hope the next body I get doesn't turn out to be another wine-guzzling, garlic eater." A tremor ran through him. "It upsets me frightfully."

"Time and the rising tide of accidents will tell," I soothed.

"I'm cold," trembled Gyf, "since I ain't got no body to keep me warm."

"You might try my secretary," I offered, playfully. "There's a body for you!"

"You know I can't," he vibrated. "She ain't even dead yet!"

"Nearest thing to it," I commented, "this side of the precinct morgue."

That brought a shake of mirth from Gyl who really has a truly remarkable sense of humor.

Gyf, ignoring the levity, slid over to the little intercom box at one side of the desk, crawled in through one of the slits, curled up, and promptly went to sleep. It seems that Fidwell, along with his other faults, had also been a sufferer of insomnia.

"I suppose," I said to Gyl, conversationally, "you'll be wanting a new body now . . ."

"Not necessarily. Not right away." He edged away from the

blotter my desk fan was blowing in his direction. "Want to wait—" A burp nearly flipped him again. "—until these garlic fumes effervesce more completely from my system."

"It worked out wonderfully well, though," I said, "even though you did have to put up with the garlic for awhile." I brought out the gin bottle from the lower drawer. "It was certainly fortunate that Gyf was on hand to occupy Fidwell just after his wife murdered him." I unstopped the bottle and raised it to my lips. "To Fidwell, departed partner and erstwhile owner of the Remey Company!"

"And the joke was on Mrs. Fidwell," sparkled Gyl's sense of humor. "Just imagine: seeing her husband up walking around, hale and hearty, just a half hour after she had throttled the life out of him with her own two hands!"

"No wonder she had to be locked up," I chuckled, pouring a few drops of gin on the polished glass near my companion.

"My getting the body of Pasquamine, owner of the floating stock, wasn't so bad either," he reminded me, isolating a drop of gin and flowing around it.

I admitted the fact.

"He nearly crushed me, too, when he tumbled," Gyl reminded. "I'd been following him two weeks,



waiting for his fat heart to do a flopperoo."

We both laughed. I took another drink, and Gyl osmosed a nip.

FINALLY, I leaned across the desk. "Listen, Gyl," I said, coldly serious. "Now that this little deal is over, how would you like to get in on something else? Something really *big*?"

He instantly became all ears. (Naturally, only a pseudopod can do it.)

"After I sell out Remey," I continued, "we'll have ample funds. So-o; if we moved over to Washington, D. C. . . . If you and Gyl could get in touch with a couple tottering congressmen who are about ready to depart from this vale of tears . . ."

Gyl caught on immediately. "T. J.," he complimented, "you've got something!"

He fell silent, and I knew he was letting the gin and the thought trickle through him, savoring both from various angles. Then he vibrated, dreamily, "I've always wanted to be a congressman. Or—or a cabinet member. Or—" His vibration dropped to little more than a whisper. "—or a *president*!"

"Sorry," I said, "but I believe he is already possessed."

Gyl flowed around another drop

of gin. "Oh, well," he said dismissing the ambition, "guess he doesn't have much to say about things, anyway." Then he brightened. "But there are some mighty fine bureaus and departments there. We could wiggle our way into one of those. A few million dollars here and there wouldn't be missed."

"Atta boy! I'll take you and Gyl over to Washington in the morning, then I'll come back here and dispose of the business while the two of you are getting established." It sounded like a good idea. Within a few years we'd be rolling in the filthy stuff.

I poured a few more drops of gin on the glass top, then raised the bottle. "Here's to happy days in the Pentagon!" I toasted.

Our spirits were soon soaring to great heights, and, as usual under such circumstances, Gyl began talking about the "good old days" when you could pick up a likely corpse almost anywhere, anytime.

"Used to be so much simpler then," he commented, flowing around one of the fresh drops. "Now you have to beat the embalmer!" He chuckled. "Fairly close race at times, too! But it keeps one on one's pseudotoes, so to speak!" A combined burp and hiccough nearly flopped him off the desk.

After he had regained his equilibrium we spent an enjoyable

half-hour talking of cadavers, funeral homes, the comparative merits of inhabiting youthful or wealthy bodies, and other delightfully stimulating subjects. Then we began to sing songs, old and new.

We had finished the chorus of "We Have All the Dough of Remy" for the third time and were just getting warmed up on an extemporization of "We'll Carry On in the Pentagon" when the office door flew suddenly open and two Federal boys stepped in, followed by my stupid-looking secretary.

They came quickly to the desk. One of them grabbed a handful of Gyl with one hand and pointed a gun at me with the other. "Just stay as you are," the officer cautioned.

My dumb secretary stared at me with round, innocent eyes. "I couldn't help hearing everything you said, Mr. Nelson," she chirped, half apologetically. "Your intercom box was open. Must be a short in it somewhere. Or a loose connection . . ."

The other officer picked up the little box and shook it. A surprised Gyl felt out from between

the slats . . .

THEY have Gyl and Gyl in a little bottle now, tightly stoppered and ready for shipment back home to Venus. They'll be placed on the next space ship heading out.

There is a stupid Terrestrial law, you know, which makes it mandatory that all Venusians, be apprehended on sight or extracted from any body they may be occupying and sent back to Venus in all possible haste.

And so I shall soon be extracted from the body of T. J. Nelson and his neck will bend double in the middle again just the way it was when I found him shortly after his accident. Then, in a little bottle of my own, I shall accompany Gyl and Gyl homeward.

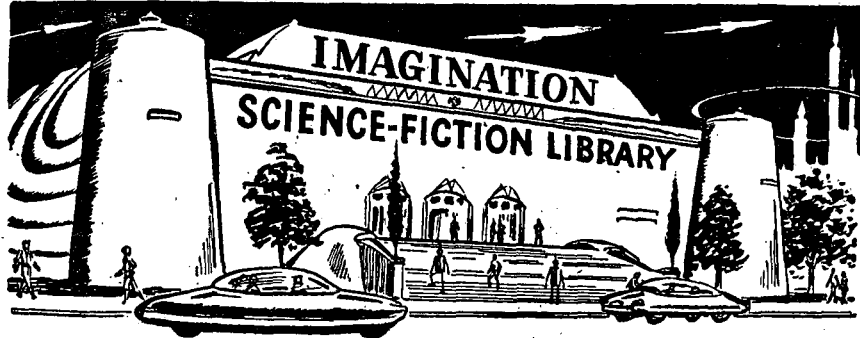
But, don't worry, I'll be back! I'll be back just as soon as I can hitch a ride on a returning space-boat!

So take good care of yourself, my friend, and don't catch pneumonia or step in front of a truck or anything like that—*until I return.*

THE END

## WANTED: YOU—AS A SUBSCRIBER TO IMAGINATION

If you'll turn to page 162 you'll find a BONUS offer that will bring you every copy of *Madge* during the coming year for a low 23c per copy. That's quite a saving for top science fiction enjoyment — so act now! And don't forget—next issue features ROBERT A. HEINLEIN's new story, so subscribe today and get your copy FREE—mailed to you immediately!



## — REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

*Conducted by Mark Reinsberg*

**Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review selected books as a guide to your recommended reading list.**

### Future Tense

*edited by Kendell Foster Crossen. 364 pages, \$3.50. Greenberg Publisher, New York, N. Y.*

Any anthologist who can make a statement like, "Two of the finest writers (if not the finest) in science-fiction today are Ward Moore and Ray Bradbury," reveals a curious deficiency in taste, judgment and scope. In his ill-tempered introduction, Mr. Crossen huffs and puffs about "meaningful literature," "objectivity versus subjectivity," and the author's relationship to his time. But the standards he condemns most s-f for failing to meet, are little exemplified in his own selections. And that quality which he editorially scorns as the object of s-f writing—namely entertainment, pure and undirected—is precisely what the first

story in his own collection (Peter Phillips' "The Plagiarist") argues for so *entertainingly*.

The book has fourteen tales, divided into two sections: stories that previously appeared in magazine form, and stories that had never before seen print. Most of the former are first-rate, most of the latter should have remained in manuscript. In the balance, *Future Tense* is a better-than-average collection.

In addition to Phillips' story, high honors go to Miriam Allen deFord's "Throwback," "Love Story" by Christopher Monig, and Mr. Crossen's own enjoyable "Things of Distinction." Ward Moore's short satire, "We the People," has a jolt ending but nothing to dethrone Heinlein.

## Science Fiction Adventures In Dimension

edited by Groff Conklin. 368 pages, \$2.95. Vanguard Press, New York, N. Y.

You might call this collection of twenty-three short stories an "anatomy of time travel." Editor Conklin has tried to represent each of the subject's possibilities—travel from the present to the future, from the present to the past, from future to present, from past to present, and parallel worlds (side-wise in time).

Among the many enjoyable examples: Day' Keene's "What So Proudly We Hail" is about a Revolutionary War hero who finds himself in, and befuddled by, modern U.S.A. "Ring Around the Red-head" by John D. MacDonald shows some of the perils of importing a beautiful gal from a neighboring dimension. A time traveler goes back to the Depression era to take advantage of bargain prices in Marion Gross' "The Good Provider," and Isaac Asimov neatly sums up

two lovers' world-of-might-have-been in "What If . . . ?"

The prize piece in the anthology is Ray Bradbury's brilliant "Night Meeting," encounter on Mars between an Earth colonist and the ghost of a Martian from forty centuries in the past. There are other good stories by Roger Flint Young, A. Bertram Chandler, Raymond F. Jones, Fritz Leiber, and an old-timer by Miles J. Breuer.

But alongside such excellence are several distinct potboilers. This need not have been. Conklin had scores of previously-anthologized time travel gems to choose from. He need not have printed anything second-rate. But he and his publisher wanted to boast on the jacket blurb, "Never before published in book form."

We wonder why this is always considered such a compliment? Perhaps there was a good reason why no other anthologist had used some of these stories!

## The Robot And The Man

Edited by Martin Greenberg. 251 pages, \$2.95. Gnome Press, New York, N. Y.

This is a collection of ten stories illustrating the theme of the robot in science-fiction. It's a neat idea. Each tale carries the robot's development another step forward, from man's first invention of the mechanical brain and earliest mobile robot, to the perfect man-servant stage and the robot's eventual "acceptance as an entity by his creators." In the end man disappears, leaving a robot civilization.

The actual selection of stories

seems weak, however, considering the wealth and range of the genre. The only above-average pieces are "Self Portrait" by Bernard Wolfe, "Final Command" by A. E. van Vogt, and "Though Dreamers Die" by Lester del Rey. The editor has altered the stories to fit his chronicle, a doubtful practice which deprives the collection of variety without improving the tales themselves. Other authors represented: John D. MacDonald, Lewis Padgett, H. H. Holmes, John S. Brownning, Joseph E. Kelleam and Robert Moore Williams.



*Conducted by Mari Wolf*

**H**AVE you ever gone to a meeting of a science fiction club? If you haven't, you're missing an interesting experience. And the chances are there's a group of stf fans meeting not too far from you.

Sometimes I get to wondering about fan clubs. How many are there? How many different types of clubs? I've been to mammoth organizations like ESFA, the Eastern Science Fiction Association, which meets in Newark, New Jersey. ESFA has a constant attendance of professionals in the science fiction field, professionals who go there both as speakers and as guests. I've also been to small groups composed primarily of high school students, like the Spacewarpers of California's San Fernando Valley. Very different types of clubs. And yet, both science fiction clubs. Which is typical? Or

are they both typical, or is any stf club typical?

The ESFA is a sort of clearing house for fans from the entire Greater New York area. By subway and bus it's not hard to reach from any of the boroughs, and of course it's accessible to the cities and towns on the Jersey side. So its members, both regular and occasional visitors, can be drawn from a population of millions.

Of course, ESFA isn't the only science fiction club in the New York area. How many others are there? I don't know . . . There's the Hydra Club, of course, but it can hardly be called a fan club, since its membership consists primarily of professionals in the field. There's the Queens Science Fiction League, which mixes very little with any of the others. And doubtless there are quite a few more.

Of course the club you've been

hearing the most about this year is the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, the sponsors of the 1953 11th World Science Fiction Convention. The PSFS is one of the oldest clubs in existence, if not the oldest, having been in continuous operation since 1935. I've never been to a meeting there myself, but I hope to have the chance to attend someday—the group seems to manage to blend serious discussion of stf with a lot of humor and fun and friendliness. And the capacity to work very, very hard to put on a fine Convention.

As you go South there seems to be quite a few clubs. One I'd like to drop in on is the group that puts out the fanzine Hyperspace. That's the group that names itself the Hopeful Young People's Extra-Radical Society for the Promotion of Amiable Conditions Everywhere. It's hard to tell from the fanzine whether or not they're a formally organized club, or just a few friends with similar interests who get together to discuss science fiction and put out a fanzine. (Which certainly would make them a club anyway, even if they're not overly fond of following the rules of parliamentary procedure.)

If you're down Atlanta way there's the Atlanta S-F Organization. I don't know much about this club either, except that it started ASFO, not so very long ago. A good new fanzine, too.

From time to time in this column I've reviewed other local and regional clubs. How many others, equally active, that I've never even heard of, I don't know. I do know, though, that if you live in Texas you can get in touch with one of

the branches of the Texas Club, or at least correspond with other Texas fans. If you live in New England there's a regional group covering your state as well as your neighbors. If you live in Oregon or Washington, you can get in touch with other active Northwest stf enthusiasts.

Wherever you live, though, if you'd like to know the addresses of nearby clubs, or the headquarters of correspondence clubs, there's one sure way of finding out. Write in to Orville Mosher, the founder of Project Fan Club, for information. He's put in a lot of work compiling a list of just about every club that there is, with all the pertinent data on it—how it's organized, whether it's formal or informal, where and how often it meets, main interests of the members, etc. Including all clubs mentioned in this column.

Just get in touch with Orville Mosher, 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas. He'll send you names and addresses of groups near you. (It works the other way too. If you're starting up a club of your own, why not send the information on it to Orville?)

I'VE mentioned several clubs that were confined to one geographical locality—the kind you could drop in on, if you were in the vicinity. But to be a typical science fiction club a group doesn't even have to have its members within assembling distance. A club like ESFA is at one extreme. At the other, you'll find the purely correspondence clubs, those whose members are scattered all over the country, if not all over the world. Lots of times the founders of this type of club live in rural areas—

one or two or three fans reaching out via their mimeo and the mails toward all others of similar tastes and similar interests in the field. Some of the most active fans of all are strictly long distance enthusiasts.

For an example of a wide flung group there's the all girl organization of fandom, the Fanettes. Here you'll find girls from all over the country. They put out their own fanzine, or Femzine, devoted to the woman's slant on things science fictional. Men can read the mag, but can't write for it, or join the club.

Another correspondence club is the SRSFCC, or Star Rockets Science Fiction Correspondence Club, which has members all over the US, and also in Japan. How many more of these letter writing clubs there are I don't have any idea. I've just mentioned some of the newer ones, and I haven't even touched yet on the big national and international clubs, with their correspondence sections and their fanzine publishing departments.

Clubs like the NFFF, or National Fantasy Fan Federation, a widespread group to which many members of local groups also belong. Or Operation Fantast, the United Kingdom club with headquarters in Great Britain and all over the world. This is an organization well worth looking into, if you're interested in making overseas friends.

Another overseas club is just getting well under way. It's the LSFO, or Lakeland Science Fiction Organization, with headquarters in Windermere, England. The club has a newszine, a library, and

a regular meeting schedule. It wants more members from all over the world believing that the more members it has, the more each member will get from it.

Then there are the big amateur press associations, FAPA and SAPS, where there's almost always a waiting list of prospective members, and where some fine fanzines are put out for intra-organization circulation only. For the fans who are really interested in writing and editing, these are especially worthwhile groups.

But getting back to the clubs more easily located in time and space—those with definite meeting addresses and definite meeting times. Perhaps, after all, these are the clubs that should be called typical, for here is where most of your science fiction fans get together once a week or once a month to discuss the latest in the field and to talk and visit and maybe put out a club fanzine.

In the Los Angeles area there's the LASFS, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. The LASFS is another of the really old clubs, with at least one of its original members still very much in evidence. I'm referring of course to long time fan Forrest J. Ackerman, a man who has really identified himself with science fiction throughout most of his life.

In San Francisco there are the Little Men—and if you've never seen a copy of their Rhodomagnetic Digest you've really missed a fine job of amateur publishing. Rhodo could hardly be called a fanzine, though. (In fact, I doubt that the Little Men would appreciate its being so called.) It's def-



initely a literary, "little" magazine.

There are clubs for the junior high and the high school age brackets. (And even among a definite age group the type of club may vary a lot, depending on the tastes of the particular membership.) There are clubs, usually rather small, that combine interest in science fiction with interest in modern music or painting or literature, and often turn out very fine magazines of the literary type. And there are many clubs, probably the great majority, where you'll find people from every age group and every walk of life, people as different from each other in most of their interests as can be—and yet with one major interest in common. Science fiction.

If you belong to a club now, you know what I mean. If you don't why not find out for yourself? I think you'll like the people you'll meet.

\* \* \*

Now to the fanzines:

ANDROMEDA: 25c; or 1/9 or 1 issue of a 35c U. S. professional sf magazine; bimonthly; Pete Campbell, 60 Calgarth Rd., Windermere, West., England. Pete Campbell also will give you information on the Lakeland Science Fiction Organization I mentioned earlier. Its goal is at least 500 members, from all over the world.

In the fifty pages of Andromeda's first issue you'll find just about the best collection of amateur science fiction I've read in a long time. Often you'll find a good story in a fanzine. But it's rare indeed when you keep finding one fine story after another. In

this issue you do just that. You'll get a quarter's worth, and more, of reading pleasure here.

\* \* \*

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; bimonthly; 1745 Kenneth Rd., Glendale 1, Calif. In this photo-offset magazine you'll find a lot more than advertising, though the advertisements are what pay the printing. Just about everyone who deals in buying and selling science fiction trades here; response to ads in this fanzine is very good indeed.

But of more interest, perhaps, to the general reader are the excellent feature articles on science fiction trends and personalities and the equally fine review section. The issue I have here has a particularly large portion devoted to book reviews; you'll find covered here just about all of the year's releases.

\* \* \*

VEGA: 10c; monthly; Joel Nydahl, 119 S. Front St., Marquette, Mich. Within a few months of its first issue Vega is becoming one of the top fanzines in the field.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's series of articles on "What Every Young Fan Should Know," is one of the best serious columns I've ever read on what fandom can actually mean to the young fan. And it's only one of many good columns in Vega.

Joel says that except for the big anniversary issue he's cutting out fiction. That's something I'm sorry to see. I liked reading Joel's own stories especially. But now I guess we'll be reading them in MADGE—he was published in last May's issue you know. A very good little story by another fan turning pro.



And he puts out a fine mimeoed zine, too.

\* \* \*

**SEVAGRAM:** 10c; published irregularly; Van Splawn, 4942 West Pine Blvd., St. Louis 8, Mo. There's some good artwork in this new fanzine. Editor Splawn's cover is particularly eye-catching.

Sevagram uses reprint material. In this case the reprints are from other fanzines of past years. There's the Redd Boggs article, "Forgotten Fantasies," on Edward Bellamy's fantastic tales, only one of which has survived to become a classic. Except for his "Looking Backward," Bellamy is forgotten as a writer of fantasies. This article and review by Boggs first appeared in 1946 in the fanzine *Star Rover*, but it's as interesting and timely now, in the fresh flood of science fiction from all quarters.

There are so many fanzine articles and stories of past years known only to a few collectors . . .

\* \* \*

**SPACE SHIP:** 10c; quarterly; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. Here's one fanzine where you'll find some thought-provoking and well-written articles, and fan fiction too, all for only a dime.

In the issue I have here it's Redd Boggs again, reviewing old time writers. This time it's the background to H. G. Wells' "Time Traveler". The history of the book and its background in the world of the 1890's is very interesting reading.

Roger Dard reports on the state of science fiction in Australia. Import troubles in the Land Down Under. And Norman Brown poses the question: "Why Isn't Canada a

force in S-F Fandom?" His conclusions: the import bans added to the decentralization of population which keeps stf readers up north from gathering together into local clubs.

\* \* \*

**FANTASTIC WORLDS:** 30c; quarterly; Sam Sackett, 1449 Brockton Ave., Los Angeles 25, Calif. At first glance the price seems rather high for an amateur magazine. But if you're really interested in quality, the extra money is well spent indeed.

For here you'll find a beautiful magazine photo-offset, with some of the best covers and interior art in the field. (Lee Hoffman's cover on the issue I have here—a winged horse in the night sky, and the shadowed rider—displays a new facet of the creative talents of the "Quandry" editor.)

Among the articles you'll always find serious discussions of science fiction and science fiction people, articles written by those well qualified to cover their subjects.

The only editorial requirement is quality. And that's what *Fantastic Worlds* has a lot of.

\* \* \*

**PENDULUM:** 15c; quarterly; Bill Venable, 610 Park Place, Pittsburgh 9, Pa. Co-editors Venable and Donald Susan put out this humorously slanted mimeoed zine. They belong to a group called *Fan Variety Enterprises*, other members of which also turn out some really good issues, such as *Stf Trends*, *Vega*, *Cosmag*, *Science-Fantasy Bulletin*, and many more.

In this issue of *Pendulum* Joe Gibson writes an article titled "Get Out the Scotch, William, We're

Lost Again." It's on astrogation, or how to find your way home from the other side of the galaxy. You don't take a fix on three stars, as you do when navigating near Earth; you take a fix on three galaxies instead.

Fiction too, and reviews of current stf.

\* \* \*

**KAYMAR TRADER:** 10c or 4/25c; monthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028-3rd Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. This adzine, or advertising fanzine, is sponsored by the NFFF, the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Here you can list any science fiction or fantasy books and magazines you wish to sell, swap, or buy — and that includes fanzines too. Often rather extensive fanzine collections are offered for sale.

Rates for ads are reasonable and you'll find complete listings here. NFFF members may subscribe to the Trader for only 25c for 6 issues, and purchase three ads for the price of two.

\* \* \*

**MICRO:** 10c; published every six weeks; Donald O. Cantin, 214 Bremer St., Manchester, N. H. Here's a digest-sized fanzine that really goes in for fannish humor. You'll find writers like Bob Bloch and Bob Tucker squaring off in these pages. In fact, unless you keep up on the personalities in the field you may find yourselves a bit bewildered at times.

But if you're a fan yourself, and especially if you're interested in maybe putting out a fanzine yourself one of these days, you ought to have a fine time with Micro.

\* \* \*

**BREVZINE:** 10c bimonthly; War-

ren A. Freiberg, 5018 W. 18th St. Cicero 50, Ill. Brevzine has gone from digest sized to full 8½ by 11 inch pages now, and the major difference is that now there's room for more stories and articles you'll enjoy.

The fiction leans more to fantasy and weird than it does to science fiction—at least in the issue I have here. My favorite in the issue was Robert Warner's "First Flight," the tale of a young boy and the witch whose spell gives him wings.

In his regular column Henry Moskowitz discusses current and coming science fiction. And there are several short bits introducing the authors of the Brevzine stories. A good way to get acquainted with some of the fan writers.

\* \* \*

**A LA SPACE:** 15c; published 7 times a year; Kent Corey, P. O. Box 64, Enid, Oklahoma. In this issue you'll find an article by pro writer Chester S. Geier on "How to Write STF." According to Chet you start by studying short model stories, and finding out by analyzing them how plots and story ideas are developed. The key, I guess, is really studying, and working at it.

Also Shelby Vick, editor of the fanzine "Confusion" has a column illustrated by one of his puffin critters. It's called "Dear Diary" (the column, not the critter) and bears a somewhat strong resemblance to Shelby's "Dear Alice" column.

\* \* \*

**STAR LANES:** 20c; quarterly; Orma McCormick, 1558 W. Hazelhurst St., Ferndale 20, Mich. Orma McCormick and co-editor Nan Gerding put out this poetry zine,

with poems by a lot of the best fantasy amateur verse writers. If you're a poetry fan this one's for you.

My favorite was Rory Faulkner's "Venusian Love Song." And Andrew Duane's "Exile." Then there's Lilith Lorraine, Robert Briney, Emily Thompson, and many, many more. And artwork by Nancy Share.

\* \* \*

**THE MARTIAN TRADER:** 15c; about every six weeks; T. Carrigan, 179 Sydney St., Dorchester 25, Mass. You can save, though, by getting three issues of this tradezine for 25c. It's a new trading medium, where you can advertise any science-fictional items you may want to sell or buy. Rates are very reasonable.

Also there are capsule reviews of other fanzines. If you have a zine you want listed in the Trader, it's very simple—just send Editor

Carrigan a copy and you'll be included.

\* \* \*

**FANTASIA:** 5c; published irregularly; Larry Balint, 3255 Golden Ave., Long Beach 6, Calif. In this newsy little fanzine you'll find reviews, a letter section, and a lot of fannish good humor. And in the issue I have here Larry Anderson's short but explicit article on "How to Grow an Airplane Plant."

If you like to enter into the spirit of good natured fanning and if you know something about the people and zines covered here, you'll get a kick out of this one.

\* \* \*

That about winds up the fanzines in the BOX for now. Remember, if you have a zine you want reviewed, send it to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

See you again next month.

—Mari Wolf

## ★ Sound And Fury ★

MUCH nonsense has been written about "mystery super-weapons" but as in so much conjecture there is just enough truth to make the subject interesting. Avowedly, according to the Congressmen the hypothetical mystery weapons of the future, the near future, are not connected with radioactivity, atomic energy or biological warfare. Only two conclusions are left to draw from, one of them improbable, the other highly likely.

The first secret weapon gestating in the laboratories might be

some sort of a heat beam ray. This is the improbable case. All physical reasoning inclines to the unlikelihood of a weapon like this. Maybe someday far in the future, yes, but now, a resounding no.

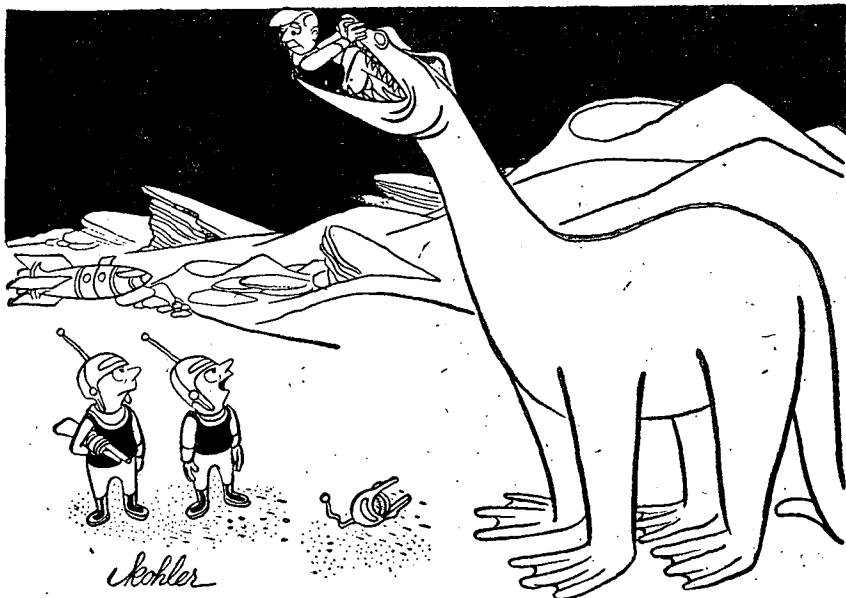
The second weapon though is another matter. By the very dearth of publication about it in the physics journals, you are inclined to suspect that it is "in the works." The weapon is of course, high frequency sound.

Of itself high frequency sound is fairly common. It's simply inaudible sound waves commonly used

in sub detection, inspection of flaws in steels and similar prosaic tasks. But high frequency sound (at a high energy level) has another less widely known property—it can kill! Experimentally there have been numerous reports about its success against rodents and insects. Bombarded with a focused ray or beam of invisible inaudible sound, the creatures have had their nervous systems, even their tissues shattered and disintegrated!

If that can happen with low-level life, it can happen with Man. Probably the only difference is the increased intensity of the sound required. Various sound generators have been designed which can provide supersonic energy at high

enough levels to injure humans. Step them up with still more power and there is no reason at all why death cannot result. High power is needed not only for the actual tissue disrupting force but also for the range and air-penetrating effect. In fact if there are limitations on a super-sonic weapon, undoubtedly they are of the range. As a matter of fact it is also likely that super-sonic weapons will be short range affairs, but that is not necessarily a drawback because they are so insidious and almost undetectable. It would be very interesting to get a peek into the sound laboratories today—it's a certainty that super-sound as a weapon is being pushed with fury!



"Stop tormenting him, Munson!"

# Letters

## from the Readers

REAL CRAZY, MAN!

Dear Bill:

The first science fiction magazine I picked up was your October 1952 issue of Madge, with the novel, ARMAGEDDON, 1970. Since then I've observed that your magazine has contained consistently high quality save for a few bumps and rough spots now and then.

I am now a faithful reader.

More of writers Dan Galouye, St. Reynard, and Philip K. Dick. Speaking of Dick, man! is that boy coming up!

Let's not have an excessive number of cartoons—but not too few either. And coax you to get a Heinlein story? I stand over you with a baseball bat.

Now about the July issue. VOYAGE TO ETERNITY was everything I'd expected of Milton Lesser. Real crazy, man!

THE ANIMATED PINUP was interesting—NATIVE SON not so. COSMIC POACHERS—now there's a story . . .

The cover—let's have more of

this! As to serials, I'm half and half. Only time I really gripe about them is when I miss the first installment.

Madge's book reviews are not outstanding, but they are better than the average . . . See you in future issues.

John Butler  
3118 Church Ave.  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

*Drop the baseball bat, John. Heinlein coming up next issue. Is it good? It's crazy man, REAL crazy! . . . . . wth*

COINCIDENCE . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have made a minor discovery in the July ish of Madge. Re the story by T. D. Hamm, NATIVE SON, I wonder if the author read IMPERFECTION by Leslie Waltham in the June issue of STARTLING STORIES. Both yarns utilized the same gimmick . . .

Now how about comparing Madge's writers with other mags—if you think you can take it.

VOYAGE TO ETERNITY by Milton Lesser in the July issue was good, and of course Lesser is a good writer—but he can't compare with Phil Farmer, George O. Smith, Fletcher Pratt, Leigh Brackett, Chad Oliver, and Sam Merwin. Not to mention Murray Leinster, Damon Knight, Jack Vance, Wallace West, and, well, I could go on . . . Madge never has writers-like these.

Madge's writers are usually good, the mag usually has good stories—but nothing outstanding. For that reason Madge will never be at the top.

However, your features are outstanding, notably FANDORA'S BOX and the EDITORIAL. Oh yes, the artwork is usually terrific, and those photo covers (July issue) are really great . . . Maybe the tone of my letter should be to get some really good writers. There is something so nice and friendly about Madge that I hate to criticize, but I thought maybe you'd like to know how I feel.

Val Walker  
6438 E. 4th Pl.  
Tulsa, Okla.

*Whether or not T. D. Hamm read the story you mention we couldn't say—but we do know that its "similarity" to one in another magazine published at the same time was sheer coincidence; Hamm's story was purchased months prior to our publishing it . . . Speaking of coincidences, we once edited a detective magazine and recall that one month we had a cover story entitled, BUT THE PATIENT DIED. Two other magazines appeared the same month with the identical title we had! As far as*

*we know that triple coincidence is something of a record . . . Writers? Madge has a fine lineup of top favorites, and the list continually grows—next month with Heinlein . . . with*

## LONG LINE TO DENMARK

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Just finished reading the July issue of IMAGINATION and I had to write and tell you that I think VOYAGE TO ETERNITY is one of the most exciting science fiction novels I have ever read. It has placed Milton Lesser among my favorite authors—Bradbury, Heinlein, Asimov, and Van Vogt.

Speaking of Heinlein, I think IMAGINATION simply must have a story by Mr. Science Fiction. You see, I started reading American science fiction about a year ago. It was Bradbury's Martian Chronicles. Next came one of Heinlein's books and I felt as if a door had been opened for me. I met a rich literary world I never dreamed of. Since then I guess I've become quite a fan.

I like IMAGINATION because it seems to me it has a line. An increasing line if I may put it that way. Every issue, in my opinion, is a little better than the previous one. I'd just like to say then, that at least one person here in Denmark is enjoying the rich creative flavor of your excellently edited magazine. I wish it all the luck in the future.

Knud Rigbolt  
15, Mozartsvej  
Copenhagen SV  
Denmark

Thanks for the kind words, Knud,

*and you'll get your story by Mr. Science Fiction next month. Hope you enjoy it . . . . . wh*

## PHILIPPINE BELLE

Dear Ed:

Little did I expect when I first met "Madge" that I would win the company of such a nice gal. Her type is a rare specie here and pretty hard to get. Madge has now become my best friend—confronting me with no problems, only entertainment.

Stories from Daniel Galouye, Geoff St. Reynard, and others regularly in IMAGINATION are sure hits. Keep them coming.

Lujano Orillo  
18 Plaza Rizal  
Majayjay, Laguna  
Philippines

*You'll be seeing more of your favorites in coming issues . . . Just received a card from St. Reynard. He's vacationing (lucky dog!) on the isle of Tobago in the British West Indies. We've told him to keep his typewriter working while he relaxes on the beach... wh*

## ARTWORK COMMENTARY

Dear Bill:

Here are a few comments on Madge's artwork. In regard to the cover on the July issue, I liked the idea of super-imposing model space ships against an astronomical photograph; however, the actual scene did not appear particularly interesting or eye-catching.

Paul Calle's interior illos for VOYAGE TO ETERNITY certainly showed a unique style for

figure work. The illo, for NATIVE SON was nice, incorporating all the essentials of the story. How about putting the artist's name under each illustration? To me at least, the illustrations are secondary in importance only to the stories. The cartoons are swell. Keep them coming.

Bob L. Stewart  
Route #1  
Brashear, Texas

*Sorry you didn't find the July photo cover particularly eye-catching. Most readers found it quite attractive. We'll see what we can do about the artist credit on each illo . . . . . wh*

## MORE LESSER AND CALLE

Dear Bill:

The July issue of Madge contained high calibre material from cover to cover. The photo-cover by Malcolm Smith was an excellent idea. Let's see more along that line. The BIG surprise was the lead novel, VOYAGE TO ETERNITY by Milton Lesser. It was interesting AND entertaining. The accompanying illustrations by Paul Calle were a welcome addition to the pages of Madge. Hope you will have more of his fine work.

Marvin J. Edwards  
1052 Merrimac Rd.  
Camden 4, N. J.

*Milt Lesser is working on a new feature novel for Madge right now, and Paul Calle will illustrate it . . . . . wh*

## OUR 3-D COVER

Dear Mr. Hamling:

At last, I believe, I am making the transition from S-F reader to S-F fan. Just two years ago I started reading science fiction at the library; six months ago I began buying stf pocketbooks, and now my first letter to a stf magazine at the ripe old age of sixteen.

I received my introduction to Madge when a friend gave me a copy of the October '52 issue and the January '53 number. I enjoyed them very much, but did not buy any stf magazines until yesterday when I picked up your July issue. It was *great!* The cover actually seemed to have depth—the 3-D everybody is talking about.

The stories in the July issue were really tops. So much so that I dashed over to a friend of mine who was selling his s-f magazines and bought a dozen issues of Madge. And just to show you how much I like the magazine I'm enclosing my subscription.

Dainis Bisenieks  
545 S. Weadock  
Saginaw, Mich.

*The July cover did have quite a bit of depth to it; one advantage of a strictly photographic cover. Watch for more in the near future. This month's cover has an interstellar photo background . . . wllh*

### BEST STF COVER YET

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I just received my July issue of Madge, and I hardly **knew it with** that photo-cover. It's the best one I've ever seen on a science fiction magazine. You said that Malcolm Smith was working on some others; as far as I'm concerned, the soon-

er he finishes them the better. I like your back covers too, but would prefer to see the photos in black rather than blue.

FANDORA'S BOX is excellent; it's the only fan magazine review column existing today. The cartoons are fine but don't use too many of them. Madge's stories range from fair on up to the best. VOYAGE TO ETERNITY was one of the best, the rest were average. You've been hinting about Heinlein—nothing could be better!

Leigh Littleton  
730 Fairview

Bowling Green, Ohio

*Speaking of covers, next month Bill Terry grabbed the honors to paint the cover for Heinlein's story. It's really a top-notch job, and quite realistic . . . wllh*

### REAL IMAGINATION

Dear Ed:

Like a lot of other people in Madge's letter column, this is my first fan letter. However upon reading through the July issue of Madge, "The Magazine with Real Imagination" I really felt inspired to write.

First of all, as to fewer cartoons, baloney! After reading a story like NATIVE SON (which I liked very much) I felt like I could use a good chaser, and the cartoon was just the thing.

As to your new book review column, well, frankly it rather falls short, mainly because I don't know whether to read the books reviewed or not. Mr. Reinsberg should be more explicit in his recommendations.



James V. Chism

1001 E. Main

Anthony, Kansas

*We'll caution Mark, feeling you have a good point there . . . wh*

## NO FLASHY COVERS?

Dear Bill:

What's with all the noise about covers? Three out of four letters in the July issue howl about McCauley's cover on the May issue. I have yet to see any cover that is worth that much hoo-rah or criticism. And then in your editorial you go flippy about Malcolm Smith's new photo-cover. So what's to yell about? So Smith spent long arduous hours carving miniature space ships; so he used an orange for a sphere ship; so he used a photograph of space as a backdrop. Seems to me it would have been a lot simpler just to paint the cover. Isn't that what artists are for?

My gosh, Bill, act your age. I'll admit that back when you broke into science fiction spectacular covers were needed to draw the customers' eyes. But now the field has grown up. People don't want *flashy* covers! We buy stf magazines for science fiction, not trick photography. Anyway, what sells stf mags today is how good the stories are, not the covers.

Del Lane

3415 Meeker Ave.

Richmond 3, Cal.

*We're not trying to sell trick photography, Del. It just seems to us—and most of our readers—that photography offers a new approach to old science fiction themes*

*that have been painted many hundreds of times. They lend a fresh slant, so to speak, and have a novelty all their own. As to readers not preferring what you term flashy covers, we'll leave that up to the gang—but our opinion is, that if you mean by flashy—drama, color, and story sense, they are preferred. True, a magazine stands or falls on its stories, but an attractive cover is not to be minimized. And while we may slip up once in awhile, we try and give Madge's covers that certain flash . . . wh*

## BELABORED ANSWER

Dear Bill:

First thing I did when I turned to the July number of IMAGINATION, was to glance at the letter column. This is a favorite policy of mine when examining the quality of any mag, and believe it or not, I always by-passed Madge on the stands until now.

My impression was that though 75% of the readers are satisfied with the magazine as it now stands, they appear to be 75% average readers contented with average stories. The remaining 25% were equally divided into out and out "raves" and out and out criticism. Neither were very interesting, though the latter was revealing; it gave me an "in" to Madge's character.

None of the stories was badly written, but there was no new theme in any of them. The most entertaining was Lesser's novel, VOYAGE TO ETERNITY. But such is not new. Nor did I think it good writing for him to keep

suspense for a few chapters on what the "voyage" was and then to have it turn out as mere teleportation. This may be all right for new fans, but not the experienced reader.

But the greatest dislike I have (outside of the dull reader column) are the pained and belabored replies to these same letters by you. The worst possible answer to a letter is a weak argument to a criticism perfectly obviously justified—more than a few weary plugs for coming stories—absence of humor, and presence of propaganda.

I'd like to end this letter with the same comment as Hank Moskowitz: "Madge is good—but she can be better."

Joe Keogh

63 Glenridge Ave.

St. Catharines, Ont., Canada

*This reply short enough? . . . wlh*

## ONE OF THE BEST

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The best way I can express my opinion of the July issue of Madge is by sending in my subscription.

The first thing that caught my eye was the impressive photo-cover. It was the best cover in a long time, and certainly the most realistic. The new book review column is an interesting and informative addition to a great magazine.

Keep using cartoons as they are one of Madge's most enjoyable features.—All this combines to make Madge one of the best science fiction magazines on the market.

Edward Rosenfeld

5309 W. Jackson Blvd.

Chicago 44, Ill.

*You'll find cartoons in all coming issues, Ed . . . . . wlh*

## PULLING UP FAST

Dear Mr. Hamling:

After reading the July issue of Madge I feel I must make myself heard. I'll begin with the cover. I was quite amazed at such a realistic cover until I read your editorial and found out it was a photo-cover. I was extremely pleased because my hobbies are astronomy and photography and you incorporated both into a fine cover.

In the letter section, I believe Virginia Poore expressed my views exactly. I understand stories very well and most times better than the adults. Thanks for your kind reply to her.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Although Madge is a fine magazine, I still prefer *Galaxy*. But since I was "raised" on it two years ago (I was 12) I guess that has a little bit to do with it. But Madge is running a close second, and pulling up fast. Your covers, reader section, and other things give it a big boost.—And I'm looking forward to seeing a Heinlein story!

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*The November issue featuring Heinlein goes on sale September 29th. Better reserve your copy at your newsstand, Mike . . . . . wlh.*

## GOING PLACES FAST

Dear wlh:

VOYAGE TO ETERNITY was the best novel this year, but there was one small item that surprised me. On the bottom of page 86 the author said: "... only six ships remained in space—casting perfect shadows on the Andromeda galaxy." How could a space ship cast a shadow on a galaxy? Now if Lesser had said they were silhouetted . . .

And speaking of covers, the one for July is the most eye-appealing and downright top-excellent one Madge has ever had. Looking back over my collection of Madge from the first issue in 1950, I find that the four most outstanding covers were for: July 1953, VOYAGE TO ETERNITY; November 1951, BEWARE, THE USURPERS; December 1952, CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON; and October 1952, ARMAGEDDON, 1970. Malcolm Smith did the first three of these, Terry the last one. So what does it prove? That since Smith obviously does the best covers that's why you use more of him. Right?

The new book review section is a very good idea. If the reviews are even half-way intelligently written (and they were in July) the particularly interesting books can be

determined beforehand so you don't have to find out the hard way. All things considered, Madge is going places faster lately!

Carol McKinney  
385 N. 8th East St.  
Provo, Utah

Malcolm is one of the finest artists in the field, Carol, and you'll be seeing many more of his covers in future issues. And Bill Terry has established quite a reputation too. Watch for his cover next issue illustrating the Heinlein story . . . As to Lesser's shadow-casting ships in deep space, we blush in shame . . . wlh.

## VOICE FROM THE CHASM

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I realize that every science fiction magazine editor has a driving ambition to improve his particular tool of expression. However, I fail to see any manifestation of that rather perverse complex which causes strong men to become stretcher cases from the effects of long hours, writer's cramp, caffeine and nicotine poisoning, and that peculiar malady caused by excessive absorption into the system of large quantities of printer's ink.

You appear to be restrainedly proud of your achievement in the introduction of photographic covers, and rightly so. But the poor reproduction of these covers, and the complete lack of progress in this line seems to infer that "This is the end of the line."

Your letter column is abominable. Do they say anything worthwhile? I have yet to see one that advances any idea important enough to war-

rant the gallons of ink to print it.

I must also complain about your excessive use of cartoons. I realize the expediency of saving money and material by the use of them. However, you are in a business to please customers . . . I don't know if your failing is due to lack of support from the owners, or from the readers, your staff, or if it is just plain, "I don't care!" In the latter case I must remind you that following improvements comes circulation, and then higher profits. But here's one voice from the chasm reflecting the views of many science fiction devotees who, when hearing the name of IMAGINATION, merely reply, "Oh, well . . ."

Joe Kinne

255 South Sixth St.

Fulton, N. Y.

*We weren't aware that a science fiction editor—to be good—must*

*needs be neurotic, exhausted, and/or addicted to certain drugs . . . huh? Guess we're a royal flop, since we're a slave to none of the earmarks of success you mention. On the other hand, we edit Madge quite relaxed, enjoy doing it, and strangely enough have gained quite a devoted following—circulation. This is not an idea column—it's for comments. Using cartoons saves us money? You hear that, artists and engravers? Don't you dare send us any more of your nasty bills! Owners support? That's us . . . We'll have to talk to the guy . . . Yep, pleasing readers is our business, and we're in there pitching every issue—hope we'll be able to get the nod from you too, Joe, one of these days. In the meantime, don't miss the next issue with Heinlein's cover story, on sale September 29th . . . with*

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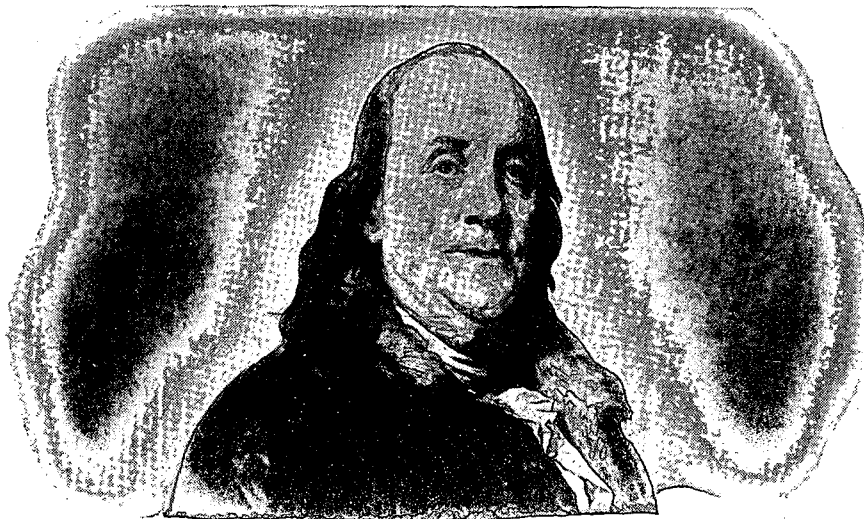
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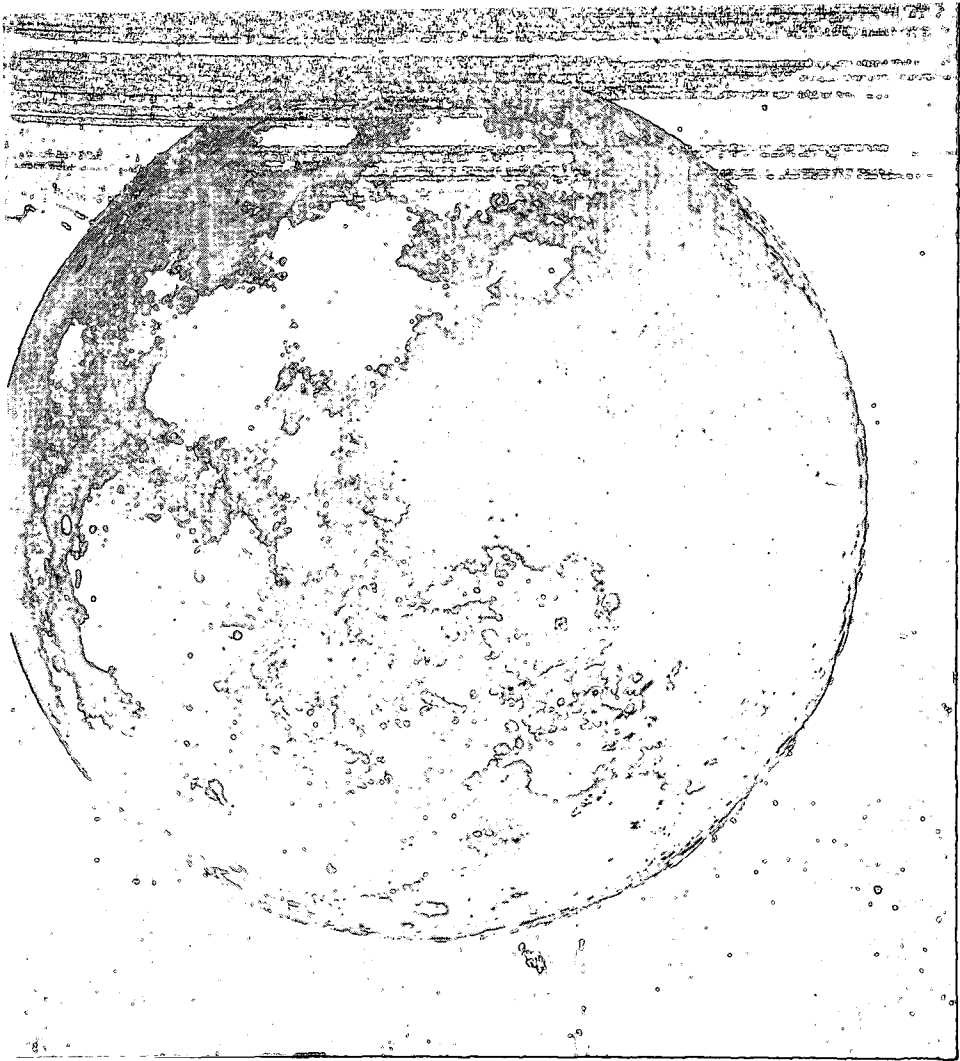
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